United Nations S/PV.8167

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8167th meeting

Thursday, 25 January 2018, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Umarov	(Kazakhstan)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

18-02114 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Argentina, Bangladesh, Botswana, Brazil, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, Estonia, Iceland, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Malaysia, Maldives, Morocco, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Mladenov is joining the meeting via video-teleconference from Jerusalem.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite the following individuals to participate in this meeting: His Excellency Mr. João Pedro Vale de Almeida, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations; His Excellency Mr. Maged Abdelfattah Abdelaziz, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations; and His Excellency Mr. Fodé Seck, Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: Too often we have met in this Chamber and said that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is at a critical stage, that the situation on the ground is unsustainable. We have all fallen into the paradigm of managing, rather than resolving, the conflict. There are those who believe that the conflict can be solved through peaceful bilateral negotiations and compromises by addressing the final status issues of borders, security, refugees and the status of Jerusalem on the basis of prior agreements and the relevant United Nations resolutions. They believe that to resolve the conflict one must have two States, living side by side in peace, security and mutual recognition. Some believe in making unilateral moves that can lead only to a one-State reality that is incompatible with the aspirations of both peoples.

And there are those who believe in violence, who are convinced that confrontation is the only option. They do not recognize that both Palestinians and Israelis — Jews, Christians and Muslims — have a legitimate national, historic and religious connection to this land. They believe that one side has to lose for the other to win; that the land can, and should, belong to only one people.

We — the United Nations, the Security Council, the international community — have a responsibility to prove that those who believe in violence and confrontation are wrong. We have a responsibility not only to prove them wrong, but to work with the Palestinian and Israeli leaders to effect a return to the negotiations table and to quickly show tangible results that will empower those who believe in peace and thwart those who uphold terror.

This year will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Oslo Accords. While its daring vision for peace remains to be fulfilled, now is not the time to give up on Oslo. The alternative is not a better deal, but a worsening reality of occupation and humiliation. Now is the time to push for policies on the ground that rebuild trust; now is the time to engage on final status issues on the basis of international consensus; now is the time to show political leadership to remove the obstacles to a sustainable solution. And what is a sustainable solution, some may ask? I believe it is one that resolves all claims

and allows Israelis and Palestinians to separate and live in peace as neighbours and partners whose security will be forever linked, yet who each manage their own affairs in a State of their own.

Now is the time for leadership. Make no mistake: while the current negative environment and dynamics may have been exacerbated by rhetoric and recent events, they are not new. The lack of political will to take meaningful action, to restore confidence and resume negotiations and the propensity to take unilateral decisions have been there for years. During that time, various peace efforts have repeatedly floundered — victims of political agendas designed to sabotage progress towards realizing a two-State solution, or victims of the fear of making historic compromises with the past in the interest of the future.

That paralysis has elicited a heavy price, namely, continued violence and insecurity; an ever-expanding settlement enterprise; a persistent Palestinian political divide; and a deteriorating, unsustainable situation in Gaza under the control of Hamas. Taken together, those elements kill hope, breed frustration and increase radicalization on the ground. Our choice today is clear. We either take urgent concrete steps to reverse that perilous course, or risk another conflict and humanitarian disaster.

In that regard, let me begin today by expressing my deep concern about funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) this year. While the recent pledge by the United States of $60 million is appreciated, it represents a significant reduction of its traditional contribution, thereby increasing anxiety for the community of 5.3 million Palestine refugees, who have already suffered the longest protracted refugee crisis in the world — 70 years.

Given tensions on the ground, I welcome UNRWA's firm commitment to continue providing services to Palestine refugees on an uninterrupted basis. Shutting down or reducing services at this critical time would further destabilize a region riddled with conflict, insecurity and radicalization. On 22 January, UNRWA launched a global fundraising campaign aimed at raising approximately $500 million to keep its schools, clinics, relief and other services open throughout 2018 and beyond. I thank the Member States that have already joined this global campaign to further support UNRWA, and I encourage others to follow suit.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to exact a steady human cost on the ground. Protests and a relatively low level of violence across the West Bank and Gaza have continued following the United States recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel, on 6 December.

Since 18 December, seven Palestinian civilians, including three children, have been killed by the Israeli security forces during protests and clashes — four in the Gaza Strip and three in the West Bank — and another two Palestinians died of wounds sustained in protests during the previous two weeks. I note the concern expressed on 19 December by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights that the use of force must be calibrated and that lethal force should be used only as a last resort, in situations of imminent threat of death or serious injury, with any resulting fatalities properly investigated by the authorities. I urge the Israeli security forces to exercise maximum restraint to avoid casualties in such circumstances.

On 9 January, an Israeli civilian was shot dead in a drive-by shooting attack near Nablus. There is no justification for terror or for those who condone, praise or glorify it. The perpetrators of that attack must be brought to justice. Subsequently, on 18 January in Jenin, one Palestinian was killed and several others arrested during a raid that the Israeli military conducted reportedly in search of the perpetrators of the 9 January attack.

The reporting period also saw Palestinian militants fire eight rockets and mortars from Gaza, with three falling inside Israel, causing damage but no injuries. In response, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) targeted Hamas military sites in Gaza, with no reported injuries as well. The IDF also destroyed a tunnel from Gaza extending into Israel and Egypt under the Kerem Shalom crossing, the third such action over the past three months. I have repeatedly stated that all militant activity, including the digging of tunnels and the firing of rockets, in Gaza must cease. It threatens the lives of Israelis and Palestinians alike, increases the risk of a new escalation of hostilities, undermines calls for lifting the closures and ultimately damages the prospects for peace.

Israel's settlement activities continue despite broad international condemnation. On 10 January, the Israeli planning authorities advanced plans for over 1,400 housing units in Area C settlements. Additionally, one

plan for nine housing units in Psagot was approved for construction. Separately, four tenders were published for approximately 500 units that had been processed in 2017. In comparison, tenders for only 50 units were opened for bidding in the whole of last year. In addition, the authorities announced that some 10 new tenders for 880 housing units in seven settlements will be published in the coming weeks.

Settlement construction is illegal under international law and is one of the major obstacles to peace. Settlement-related activities undermine the chances for the establishment of a viable, contiguous Palestinian State as part of a two-State solution. Two recent developments further fuelled perceptions that the forces that want to block a two-State solution in Israel are gaining ground.

On 31 December, the Central Committee of the Likud party adopted a resolution calling for "unhindered" settlement construction and to "extend Israeli law and sovereignty in all the areas of liberated settlement in Judea and Samaria". While not binding, the resolution increases the political pressure for annexation of parts of the West Bank and further undermines Palestinian belief in peace efforts. Days later, the Knesset passed an amendment to the Basic Law: Jerusalem, which is likely to make it more difficult in any future peace agreement for Israel to transfer control over areas currently within the area it defines as Jerusalem's municipal jurisdiction to Palestinian authority.

The demolition of Palestinian-owned structures has also continued, with 16 structures demolished due to the lack of building permits that are nearly impossible to obtain, as noted in the Quartet report of 2016. Fourteen Palestinians have been displaced by these actions. Four additional structures were destroyed during a military operation in Jenin, displacing another 16 Palestinians. Of particular concern is the risk of demolition of 46 school structures in Area C and East Jerusalem.

As the security forces continue to arrest Palestinians in various security operations — some 400 have been detained over the past month — I want to highlight one particular case. On 1 January, 12 charges were brought against Ahed Tamimi, a 16-year-old Palestinian girl arrested in December. Her detention followed the release of a video in which she was seen slapping and kicking two Israeli soldiers in her front yard. On 17 January, an Israeli military court ruled that she would be held until the end of legal proceedings against her. As stated by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on 16 January, the detention of a child must only be used as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible time. I reiterate the High Commissioner's call that the treatment of all minors be in accordance with international law and the special protection that it grants to children.

On the Palestinian political front, I want to report to the Council that in response to the United States decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and following the General Assembly vote on 21 December, the Palestinian Central Council met in Ramallah on 14 and 15 January. In its final statement, the Central Council, inter alia, rejected the United States as a partner until it cancels this decision and rescinds both the designation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as a terrorist organization and the closure of the PLO office in Washington, D.C. The Central Council further declared that the Oslo process was no longer valid and tasked the PLO Executive Committee to suspend the recognition of Israel until it recognizes the State of Palestine and annuls its annexation of East Jerusalem, to halt security coordination and to revisit economic relations with Israel. We are yet to see whether these decisions will be adopted by the PLO Executive Committee and implemented. Under the current circumstances, however, I encourage all parties to refrain from action and rhetoric that would further undermine the chances of returning to meaningful negotiations and to continue their engagement in the interest of peace.

Turning to Gaza, the worsening humanitarian and security crisis continues to feed a deteriorating situation. The implementation of the Egyptian brokered intra-Palestinian agreement has effectively ground to a halt. The two sides have been unable to reach agreement, particularly on key obstacles including the collection of taxes, the integration of and payment of salaries to public-sector employees, the status of the return of Government administration in the ministries and other institutions and, ultimately, security control of Gaza. These challenges must be quickly overcome or the process risks being derailed entirely, leaving Gaza primed for a new escalation.

Despite these setbacks, I am encouraged that the Gaza crossings continue to be controlled by the legitimate Palestinian authorities after their handover on 1 November. I also welcome the decision of the Palestinian Authority on 3 January to resume

payments for the full amount of electricity — 120 megawatts — purchased from Israel for Gaza, allowing for an increase in supply to six-to-eight hours of electricity per day.

The humanitarian situation, however, remains dire. With the current funding available, the United Nations will not be able to provide fuel to hospitals and critical infrastructure in Gaza beyond the end of February. I also take note of Israel's decision to approve some 85 private-sector projects through the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism since the start of the year. Yet, these positive developments are not an alternative to the lifting of closures on Gaza and to returning the Strip to the full control of the legitimate Palestinian Authority. The combustible cocktail of humanitarian, political and security challenges must be addressed urgently and effectively.

In an effort to support the peace process and address the dire situation in Gaza, Norway and the European Union will convene an extraordinary session of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians on 31 January at the ministerial level. This important meeting aims to bring all parties together to discuss measures to accelerate efforts that could underpin a negotiated two-State solution and to enable the Palestinian Authority to resume full control over Gaza. I call on the parties to work constructively and produce tangible outcomes that support these objectives.

Turning to Lebanon, efforts there continue to consolidate stability following the return of Prime Minister Hariri. As part of the implementation of the 8 December Paris International Support Group communiqué, preparations are under way for a conference in support of the Lebanese Armed Forces and security institutions, to be hosted by Italy in late February. Preparations also continue for parliamentary elections in May.

The situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remains generally quiet. Following the stated intention by the Israel Defense Forces to conduct infrastructure work south of the Blue Line, including in certain areas where Lebanese officials have raised strong objections, UNIFIL's leadership has been engaged with both parties through the established liaison and coordination arrangements. The matter will be discussed at the next tripartite meeting.

In closing, I wish to emphasize the gravity of the current challenges.

Twenty-five years after the Oslo Accords, we are at a critical point in the peace process. The uncertainty and volatility of the current environment are hardening positions and sharpening the rhetoric on all sides — a situation that plays directly into the hands of extremists and increases the risk of another conflict. Absent a credible proposal that could become the basis of final-status negotiations, the international community must continue to build the conditions necessary for a resumption of talks. We must also reaffirm the international consensus that the two-State solution remains the only viable option for a just and sustainable end to the conflict. We must be unwavering in this position.

At the same time, it is vital to maintain support for strengthening Palestinian institutions and enhancing service delivery to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Allowing the Palestinian project to backslide at this delicate stage risks further destabilizing an already precarious situation. The recent cuts to the funding of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East only reinforce these concerns.

As far as Gaza is concerned, I call on the international community to support efforts to return the Strip to the control of the Palestinian Authority. If the process stalls, the people of Gaza will face increasingly desperate conditions and will lose hope of any progress. I commend Egypt for its leadership role and continued commitment to this process.

We can wait no longer to reverse the current negative trajectory of the conflict. Every illegal settlement advancement, every person killed and every failed effort in Gaza makes it more difficult for Palestinians and Israelis to overcome their divisions, rebuild trust and invest in the goal of resolving the conflict. It is time to break the destructive pattern and begin again to lay the foundations of peace.

The President: I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour: On behalf of the State of Palestine, I congratulate Kazakhstan on assuming the Security Council presidency and express appreciation to you, Sir, for your able leadership of the Council's important agenda. We also thank the Special

Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing.

I also extend our warmest congratulations to the new elected members of the Security Council — Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Kuwait, the Netherlands, Peru and Poland — and wish them every success in upholding their responsibilities in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the Council's resolutions as they collectively seek to fulfil the duty to maintain international peace and security.

We also renew sincere appreciation to the countries and delegations of Egypt, Italy, Japan, Senegal, Ukraine and Uruguay upon completing their terms, during which they served with exemplary commitment, competence and wisdom. We recognize their countries' contributions to the Council's efforts to address the many critical issues on its agenda, including the question of Palestine, throughout their tenure and in the face of many crises. Those contributions were most recently reflected in the vote taken by the Council on 18 December 2017 on the draft resolution (S/2017/1060) submitted by Egypt, as the Arab representative on the Council, on the status of Jerusalem. While the draft resolution was, regrettably, vetoed (see S/PV.8139), we remain grateful for the honourable stance taken by the overwhelming majority of countries in reaffirming the relevant resolutions and the key principles to Palestinian-Israeli peace that are a matter of international consensus.

Looking back, the year 2017 ended on a disheartening note, as we bore witness to decisions denigrating the rights and national aspirations of the Palestinian people and dismissing the global consensus that has prevailed for decades based on the Security Council's resolutions on Jerusalem and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in its entirety. At the same time, however, we found solace and hope in the resounding rejection of such decisions and in the unequivocal reaffirmations — here in the Chamber, in the General Assembly and in capitals around the world — of the relevant resolutions, including, inter alia, resolutions 476 (1980), 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016); of respect for the legal, political and historical status of the city of Jerusalem; of East Jerusalem's status as occupied and as an integral part of the rest of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967; of respect for the historical status quo at Al-Haram Al-Sharif and of Jordan's custodianship of the Muslim and Christian holy sites in the city; and of fundamental positions and principles recognizing Jerusalem's special status, sensitivity and centrality to peacemaking, and hence its designation among the final-status issues to be resolved for the achievement of a just and lasting peace.

Assumptions that all of that could somehow be skirted, or that peace could be achieved otherwise — whether unilaterally or by illegal imposition of facts on the ground — are faulty assumptions at best, and dangerous and reprehensible at worst.

Our position rejecting the 6 December 2017 decision on Jerusalem by the United States Administration has been fully conveyed to the Council and remains unwavering. We remain insistent with regard to respect for the law and our rights, and we reject that unilateral, provocative decision, which directly contravenes the Charter and United Nations resolutions on the matter. That decision is null and void and has no legal effect on the status of Jerusalem. We welcome the General Assembly's decisive affirmation in that regard on 21 December 2017 (see A/ES-10/PV.37) and reiterate our deep appreciation as well for the actions undertaken by the Arab Ministerial Council, the Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries in response to that crisis.

In response to repeated distortions of our position, I am compelled to clarify further. Our position is not intended as disrespect and should not be interpreted as such by anyone. On the contrary, it is a position rooted in full respect for the law, for the principles of justice and equity, for the Charter, for the Council, for the Assembly and for the decades-long international consensus on the parameters of a peaceful solution. It is a position of respect for the legitimate national aspirations of our people, who have been so patient and steadfast in spite of the grave injustice they continue to endure. It is a position of respect for the human rights and dignity of our people, which we cannot allow to be denied. No price tag can be put on the rights and dignity of any people. They cannot be quashed by threats, intimidation or punitive action. Such attempts must be rejected by all who seek peace and justice and who truly believe in international law as the path for their realization.

We will therefore remain resolute on three counts: in calling for the application of international law to the question of Palestine in all of its dimensions and without exception, in our historic pursuit of the inalienable

rights of our people and in our commitment to peace and coexistence.

Nothing that we have done in the recent period or at any other point in the long years of the Middle East peace process should be misconstrued or cynically portrayed as a rejection of peace. On the contrary, although it is unacceptable that we — the aggrieved party, the occupied people, dispossessed, colonized and brutalized — face demands to repeatedly prove our worthiness to be granted inalienable human rights, including to be a free people in our own land, we have consistently demonstrated our good faith and our commitment to peace.

We have done that despite the enormous sacrifice we have been asked to make in the context of the historic compromise devised by the international community in the form of the two-State solution along the 1967 lines. We accepted that compromise 30 years ago, in 1988, and have adhered to it ever since throughout every phase of the peace process, from Oslo forward. We have emained committed even in the face of the duplicity, bad faith and illegal policies and practices by Israel, the occupying Power, destroying not only the two-State solution, inch by inch and day by day, but also destroying the very belief that peace is possible. That cannot be reasonably denied by anyone.

It is therefore appalling to witness the resurgence of claims by the Israeli Prime Minister and other Government officials that the President of the State of Palestine, President Mahmoud Abbas, is not a man of peace. Exploiting the current circumstances and the anger and resentment they have caused, they are again attempting to distract the international community and evade responsibility for the political deadlock and deplorable situation on the ground by making such false, shameful claims about the Palestinian side. We have seen such demonization before; it is repugnant and we firmly reject it.

History and facts speak for themselves, and such claims could not be farther from the truth. The commitment of President Abbas to diplomacy, international law, negotiations and non-violence as the means for achieving a peaceful and just solution that would realize the rights of the Palestinian people and their legitimate aspirations to live in freedom, dignity and security in their homeland, while coexisting side by side with Israel in the context of a two-State solution, has been demonstrated time and time again.

President Abbas continues to actively consult with capitals across the globe, having just visited Brussels several days ago and Amman, Ankara, Addis Ababa, Cairo, Beijing, Berlin, Madrid, Moscow, New Delhi, Paris, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere over the past year. He has also received delegations nonstop in our continuing search for peace. That has been his life's work, and the Palestinian leadership has conformed to it, in word and deed, for decades. Doubting that, in the storm of provocations and schemes to which we are currently being subjected in response to our firm stance on principle, reveals utter ill intent and is unethical and offensive.

Against the backdrop of those developments and the ever-worsening situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and in our refugee camps throughout the region, it would be an understatement to say that the Palestinian people are facing an existential crisis. We have rung the alarm bells before, to no avail. Yet we are compelled by the gravity of the situation to do so again today. We do that with the deep conviction in the justice of our cause and concern for the plight of our people, but also with the abiding conviction in the power of international law and the role of this Organization to deliver us to justice and a peaceful end to the conflict, which has inflicted such suffering and tragedy.

Right now, the world is witnessing in shocking detail the dehumanization of the Palestinian people — their subjugation and deprivation, attempts to erase their history, heritage and identity, and the systematic destruction of their generations-old communities, their will and their hope, with no end to that travesty on the horizon. Our stand is therefore neither a case of brinkmanship or posturing. This is about people's lives — in this case, about an entire nation.

It is a crisis that unquestionably concerns our very existence in our national homeland, our rights, including to self-determination and return, and our survival as a people. And, as in similar crises in history, it is entirely man-made and is made worse every day by man's decisions, by greed, cruelty and might over right, while tormenting innocent children, women and men and determining their fate. Their crime? It is their ethnicity as Palestinians, and their religion as Muslims or Christians, as non-Jews, and their insistence on living in freedom and dignity in their homeland.

For that, they are openly degraded and demonized by the occupying Power and its people, who are incited against them to the point of outright extremism and terror. They are forcibly driven from their homes and land by a violent, oppressive occupation that is unrelenting in its colonization, fragmentation and annexation of their territory, with settlements and the feverish pace of the wall's construction. Their human rights are trampled, and they are besieged and blockaded in a massive form of collective punishment. They are arrested, detained and imprisoned. Even children are not spared, as we heard from Mr. Mladenov this morning. We witnessed such horror in the plights of a 16-year-old girl, Ahed Tamimi, and a 16-year-old-boy, Malik Al-Jawabra, who, along with the hundreds of other children, were abducted from their homes, held captive by the occupation and tried by the only juvenile military court in the world.

All of that is being done under the pretext of security and religious edicts, whereby any means, no matter how brutal, immoral or illegal, are justified in the ongoing pillage, displacement, humiliation and torture of the other. Even in this Chamber, the highest multilateral and political security body, and in a secular Organization established on the base of international law — our one common language — we are subjected to biblical preaching and the denigration of the rights of an entire people on the basis of religious ideology and the premises of supremacy and exclusivity. That not only contradicts international law and human rights, but sets a dangerous precedent in this Council extending far beyond the question of Palestine.

The purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the very reason for the United Nations existence are being trampled before our eyes and without consequence. Once again, the message is that the law does not matter and that those who follow the rules will lose, while those who break and mock them will win. What impact will such a message have on our youth at this critical moment in the history of our region and the world? In the same vein, we must ask: What message is being sent by the reduction of humanitarian support at this time of need? What is to be gained from depriving innocent, vulnerable refugees of subsistence and driving them to desperation? How does that serve the cause of peace and stability? How can the politicization of humanitarian assistance be accepted? It cannot in any way.

We appeal for compassion and the upholding of humanitarian law, principles and collective responsibilities. We urge donors to enhance support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and to ensure the continuity of its internationally recognized, vital humanitarian and development assistance to more than 5.5 million Palestine refugees and of its contribution to regional stability in this most volatile period. We welcome the recent statement by Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl and his call on the international community to stand with the Agency and respect its long-standing commitments and shared principles. We also welcome Secretary-General António Guterres' efforts to mobilize support.

We also recognize the important role of the host countries and the generous response of some States to accelerate their support at this time in order to help the Agency, which was mandated by the General Assembly, in line with obligations, commitments and the relevant resolutions, pending a just solution. We call on all States to increase their support to the Agency if possible, highlighting the Commissioner-General's message that beyond humanitarian aid, UNRWA stands for hope and respect for rights and dignity, which are so crucial in the absence of a solution and the growing despair and uncertainty about the future.

In the span of one year, we have seen hopes for peace rise and suddenly be dashed. Since the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016) one year ago in this Chamber, the dramatic deterioration of the situation, the escalation of tensions and the deepening political deadlock have been cause for grave concern. We continue to believe that resolution 2334 (2016) represents the best chance for rectifying the course and salvaging the two-State solution based on the 1967 lines with the aim of ending the Israeli occupation that began in 1967, thereby justly resolving the question of Palestine in all its aspects and making Palestinian-Israeli peace a reality. That was at the heart of the urgency of the resolution's adoption and its unanimous global welcome at the time — with the exception of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and his Government, who stand in obstruction of the two-State solution and all peace efforts.

The failure to implement the relevant resolutions and to hold Israel accountable in the face of its flagrant non-compliance and violations only further foster such impunity, diminishing peace prospects day by day, hour by hour. Complacency and defeatism in the face of such

crimes and, worse yet, any manner of complicity are totally unacceptable. In that context, actions violating relevant resolutions and granting recognition to Israel's illegal measures in occupied Palestine, including East Jerusalem, are inexcusable, unlawful and must be rejected by all.

Now is the time for collective action in response to the explicit calls made in resolution 2334 (2016), including for intensification of international and regional diplomatic efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace on the basis of the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet road map and an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967.

Now is the time for the international community to mobilize the political will to implement the relevant resolutions and to revive the peace option, averting the grave impact that the continued unravelling of the situation will have regionally and globally. Recent developments to the contrary must not dissuade us from moving forward on that basis, but rather must strengthen our resolve.

We reiterate the Palestinian leadership's call, as made at the highest levels at the Palestine Liberation Organization Central Council last week, for a collective peace process under international auspices aimed at achieving a just solution and fulfilling the long-denied rights of the Palestinian people. It is a fair request for, despite all our best efforts, it is clear that unilateral initiatives have failed. The mechanisms for such a collective process already exist and should be immediately activated.

We call on the Quartet, bearing in mind its responsibilities; the Security Council, bearing in mind its Charter duties and relevant resolutions; and the United Nations, bearing in mind its permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it is justly resolved, to act now, on the basis of international law and with the tools available to them, to stem this dangerous downward spiral and salvage the prospects for peace.

We underscore the stated readiness and capacities of the European Union and the Russian Federation to fulfil their respective roles in the Quartet, in accordance with its Security Council-mandated responsibilities, and believe that its expansion to include other relevant and willing international and regional partners would serve the cause of peace. We urge all peace-loving countries, large and small, to support our call for collective action without delay in the interest of peace and justice.

We reiterate our appeal to those countries that have not yet done so to recognize the State of Palestine on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with the relevant resolutions, in respect of the erga omnes right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, and as a significant contribution to a peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, based on the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security. All States must step up their efforts to uphold their commitments and obligations to bring an end to the unlawful and unjust situation that prevails. No peace initiative will ever succeed otherwise.

On our part, in spite of immense challenges and growing hopelessness, we shall continue to adhere to international law and to engage responsibly with the international community, using all political, diplomatic, legal and popular means possible to realize the freedom and independence of our people, restore their rights, and establish a just and lasting peace. We respectfully ask that that good faith be reciprocated and that the Council not let the Palestinian people down at this most critical existential moment.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): Israel congratulates you, Sir, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council this month. We welcome and convey our best wishes to the new members of the Council.

It is with grave concern that I again raise the issue of the threat we in the Chamber all face. That threat comes from Iran. We all saw what happened in Iranian towns and cities. Brave people — young and old alike — marched in the streets, demanding a better life. They chanted, "Not Gaza. Not Lebanon. I give my life for Iran". The Iranian people know that when the regime tries to steal their lives, it does so by stealing their resources. That is why they rose up against their Government. We salute their moral fight.

But I am not here to address the Council only about the noble struggle of the Iranian people. I take the floor to talk about the dangerous activities of the Iranian regime, which become deadlier each day. We have cautioned the Council about Iranian extremism

time and again. We have warned the Council about Iranian tentacles of terror spreading far and wide. We have repeatedly shown clear evidence of Iran's build-up in Lebanon through its proxy Hizbullah. We have also seen that many countries choose to remain silent while Iran sneaks into Israel's backyard. Iran has invested up to $35 billion in Syria. I repeat — $35 billion.

We have spoken about the terror that Iran spreads throughout the world. We have warned about Iran's military advancement in our region, but words are not enough. I will now share with the Council classified information that clearly shows the extent of Iran's military build-up in Syria. We are releasing that information so that the world understands the growing Iranian threat.

Today, there are 82,000 fighters directly under Iranian authority in Syria. They include 3,000 members of Iran's infamous Revolutionary Guard Corps, 9,000 fighters from Iran's proxy Hizbullah, and 10,000 members of violent Shia militias recruited from across the Middle East, including from Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. In addition, Iran directly commands 60,000 local Syrian fighters. These are hard facts that cannot be disputed. Iran's military actively trains militant extremists from all over the world, and uses Syria as its strategic base. The Iranians themselves claim that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) is on the run in Syria. Why do they continue to send in their forces? Why do they continue to recruit extremists to be killed on the battlefield in Syria? Why does Iran build bases to house those fighters for the long-term? The answer is clear. They do so to further destabilize Syria and our region, further threaten Israel and further terrorize the entire free world.

Iran's dangerous behaviour does not end with the fighters it brings to Syria. It is also building missile factories in Syria and its presence turns the innocent people in surrounding areas into human shields. Iran is turning the entire country of Syria into the largest military base in the world. In fact, it is trying to destabilize every aspect of Syria. The Iranian regime is doing this so that it can maintain control over a country that has been destroyed. It needs that control so that it can destabilize the entire region. One thing is clear. The Shiite crescent has reached our doorstep. Iran is ready to strike at a moment's notice. General Mohammad Ali Falaki, of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, has confirmed that alarming fact, describing the Guard's forces throughout the Middle East as one unified army, created to protect Shiite power, defend the Supreme Leader and attack Israel from the North, not from a string of Iranian terror cells but from a full-blown Iranian military frontier. From Israel's perspective, our northern border is one northern front, with Iran's proxy Hizbullah on the one hand and Iran in Syria on the other. We can no longer distinguish between Lebanon and Syria.

Let me be clear. Israel has taken no side in the Syrian civil war. We support the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement, but we will always defend ourselves. We will always take any action necessary to secure our borders and protect our citizens. The Shiite crescent stretches far beyond Israel. It is larger and more powerful than ever, and it is aiming for the entire world. The entire international community should be concerned about Iran, because even though Iran is starting with Israel, it is the rest of the world that is next. An Iranian presence in Syria will evolve just as ISIS did. It will spill quickly into Europe and then across the globe.

Iran nearly doubled its trade with Europe in the past year. Major European corporations have signed multibillion-dollar deals since 2015. One European country has signed a $720 million solar-energy deal with Iran. Another has pledged nearly $600 million in credit to its companies doing projects in Iran. That is a mistake. The world may be taking advantage of the lifted sanctions now, but it cannot ignore where the money is going. Since the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in 2015, Iran has only increased its military spending. In 2014, 17 per cent of Iran's Government spending was on the military, but last year, in 2017, the number jumped to 22 per cent — $23 billion spent on missiles, arms and other weapons of war. In 2018 Iran's military budget will only continue to grow. The money that the regime earns from its economic deals with other countries will be spent on ballistic-missile tests, nuclear development and the promotion of worldwide terror. In the past two years Iran has conducted 25 ballistic-missile tests, in direct defiance of resolution 2231 (2015). Its evil destruction funds will go straight to Syria and after that will be used against the rest of the world. While the world is making a profit, Iran is building an empire.

Let us take a closer look at Iran's spending. It allocates nearly $1.5 billion to its proxies in Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Gaza, as well as in Judea and Samaria. That is right. We are facing Iran to our North and our South. Iran sends more than $800 million a

year to Hizbullah alone, and Hizbullah uses that money to terrorize northern Israel and southern Lebanon. Through Hizbullah, Iran has violated multiple Security Council resolutions by funding terror organizations' operations on our border. They store illegal weapons in towns and villages and exploit non-governmental organizations in order to mask their evil plans. Iran has sent more than $100 million each to the Houthi rebels in Yemen, to the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas, and to Shiite militias in Syria and Iraq. The lifting of the sanctions in the wake of the nuclear deal has released $100 billion in frozen Iranian assets, and the Iranian regime is now exploiting that money, using it to increase its slush fund for terror.

The Shiite crescent is alive and well. We must not let Iran turn it into a Shiite horizon. Iran has a simple but criminal plan. First, it wants to destroy Israel. Secondly, it wants to destabilize and terrorize the region. Thirdly, it wants to threaten the entire world. When Iran takes control, we are all in danger. Some of those here may be looking the other way right now, but soon enough the Iranian guns will be pointing directly at them. The path forward is clear. The Security Council knows what must be done. Resolution 2231 (2015) must be fully implemented. Iran cannot be allowed to continue funding worldwide terror, pursuing its dangerous missile programme and growing its military presence abroad.

I have laid out troubling new facts about Iran's military presence in Syria. None of us should sit idly by in the face of its aggression. We must all stand strong in defence of our shared values. Now is the time for the Council to unite and to firmly and effectively confront this menace to international stability.

The President: I now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mrs. Haley (United States): I would first like to thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

During the past year, as the representative of the United States I have most often taken the position that this monthly meeting on the Middle East is miscast. As I have pointed out many times, we spend far too much time in this meeting on Israel and the Palestinians and far too little time on the terrorist regimes and groups that undermine peace and security in the region, chief among them Iran, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, Hizbullah and Hamas. That remains my view, and I expect that in the months to come I will continue to focus on the threats from the Middle East that attract too little attention at the United Nations. Today, however, I will set aside my usual practice, and I too will focus on the issue of peace between Israel and the Palestinians. What has changed?

The events of the past month have shed light on a critical aspect of the Israeli-Palestinian problem, and it is important to ensure that we do not miss the opportunity to bring attention to it here at the United Nations. The aspect I will address is the single most critical element to achieving peace. No, it is not the issues of security, borders, refugees or settlements. All those are important parts of a peace agreement, but the single most important element is none of them. The indispensable element is leaders who have the will to do what is needed to achieve peace. Real peace requires leaders who are willing to step forward, acknowledge hard truths and make compromises. It requires leaders who look to the future rather than dwelling on past resentments. Above all, such leaders require courage.

The Egyptian President Anwar Sadat was such a leader. Forty years ago, President Sadat did an exceptional thing. Egypt and Israel were still in a state of war. In fact, Sadat himself had led Egypt in war with Israel only a few years before. But Sadat made the courageous decision to pursue peace, and when he had made that decision, he went to Jerusalem and delivered a speech before the Israeli Knesset. The fact that he went to the Knesset was courageous in itself, but what took real courage was what he said there. He did not go to Jerusalem on bended knee. He spoke in no uncertain terms about the hard concessions he expected from the Israelis. And then he said the words that both he and the world knew marked a turning point. He said to the Israeli legislators,

> "You want to live with us in this part of the world. In all sincerity, I tell you, we welcome you among us, with full security and safety .... We used to reject you .... Yet today, I tell you, and declare it to the whole world, that we accept to live with you in permanent peace based on justice."

Those were the words that led to peace between Egypt and Israel. It was not an easy process; it took another 16 months of tough negotiations to reach a peace treaty, and both sides made difficult compromises. But Sadat's words helped make Israel understand that it had a partner with which it could make those painful compromises. Some have said that those were the words

that got Anwar Sadat killed, but no one can question the generations of Egyptians and Israeli citizens that have enjoyed a peace that has stood the test of time.

Compare those words to what Palestinian President Abbas said to the Palestine Liberation Organization Central Council 11 days ago. In his speech, President Abbas declared the landmark Oslo peace accords dead. He rejected any American role in peace talks. He insulted the American President. He called for suspending recognition of Israel. He invoked an ugly and fictional past, reaching back to the seventeenth century to paint Israel as a colonialist project engineered by European Powers.

Once more, let us contrast Sadat's words with Abbas's. President Sadat acknowledged that some Arab leaders did not agree with him, but he told them that it was his responsibility to

> "exhaust all and every means in a bid to save my Egyptian Arab people and the entire Arab nation the horrors of new, shocking and destructive wars".

President Abbas also acknowledged criticism from other Arab leaders, and he too had a message for them. His response was that they should get lost. Curiously, his speech has gotten little attention in the media. I encourage all who care about the cause of a durable and just peace in the Middle East to read President Abbas's speech for themselves. A speech that indulges in outrageous and discredited conspiracy theories is not the speech of a person with the courage and the will to seek peace.

Despite all of this, the United States remains fully prepared and eager to pursue peace. We have done nothing to prejudge the final borders of Jerusalem. We have done nothing to alter the status of the holy sites. We remain committed to the possibility and potential of two States, if agreed to by the parties. Just as it did for Egypt, peace requires compromise. It requires solutions that take into account the core interests of all sides, and that is what the United States is focused on for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hate-filled speeches and end runs around negotiations take us nowhere. Ultimately, peace will not be achieved without leaders with courage.

King Hussein of Jordan was another such leader. In 1994, he ended 46 years of war and entered into a peace agreement with Israel that holds to this day. When he signed the peace treaty, he said:

> "These are moments in which we live. The past and the future .... [W]hen we come to live next to each other as never before, we will be doing so, Israelis and Jordanians together, without the need for any to observe our actions or supervise our endeavours. This is peace with dignity. This is peace with commitment".

I ask here today, where is the Palestinian President? Where is the Palestinian King Hussein? Where is the Palestinian Anwar Sadat? If President Abbas demonstrates that he can be that type of leader, we will welcome it. His recent actions demonstrate the total opposite. The United States remains deeply committed to helping the Israelis and the Palestinians reach a historic peace agreement that brings a better future to both peoples, just as we did successfully with the Egyptians and the Jordanians. But we will not chase after a Palestinian leadership that lacks what is needed to achieve peace. To get historic results, we need courageous leaders. History has provided such leaders in the past. For the sake of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, we pray that it does so again.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his substantive briefing on the situation regarding a Middle East settlement.

The Palestinian issue remains at the epicentre of instability in the Middle East and North Africa. The Russian Federation has consistently advocated for a fair settlement of it on the basis of the well-known international legal framework that includes the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, which presuppose the concept of a two-State solution and envision a negotiated settlement to all final-status issues in the Palestinian territories.

We have been compelled to conclude that the task of relaunching the Palestinian-Israeli political dialogue has lately become significantly harder, not only because of settlement construction and the unending provocative rhetoric and violence on both sides but also because of a number of other factors that have undermined every achievement of the Middle East peace process in recent times. Instead of seeing progress with a viable plan for resolving the Palestinian-Israeli situation, we have been witness to some notorious decisions concerning Jerusalem. The Palestinians — indeed, the

Arabs in general — have greeted those measures with total rejection. Palestinian representatives have made statements declaring their loss of trust in the role of the United States as a mediator, proposing suspending their recognition of Israel and withdrawing from the Oslo accords, including the Paris Protocol on economic relations. Such emotional reactions emphasize how delicate the question of Jerusalem is within the framework of a Middle East settlement. Unfortunately, that was followed by damaging decisions to cut financial aid to Palestine, including contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We cannot countenance a situation in which the Palestinians find themselves in a position where they will effectively have nothing left to lose. It would fuel radicalism and could cause the situation in the Palestinian territories and the entire region to erupt.

In our view, the solution to this situation lies in resuming a direct Palestinian-Israeli dialogue on all contentious issues, including the status of Jerusalem, as soon as possible. Considering the extraordinary significance of the holy city for followers of the three monotheistic religions, we call on all sides to exercise restraint and refrain from any initiatives that could have dangerous and unpredictable repercussions. Free access for all believers to Jerusalem's holy sites must be protected. It will be essential to arrive at equitable, long-term agreements that correspond to previous decisions of the international community and reflect the interests of both sides. Implementation of the recommendations in the 2016 report of the Middle East Quartet (S/2016/595, annex) would establish a good foundation for achieving that objective. In the context of measures aimed at creating the right conditions for a resumption of the peace process, we would like to point to the gradual return of the legitimate Government of Palestine to the Gaza Strip that began in October 2017, with Egypt's assistance. We hope that all the Palestinian parties will demonstrate the political will necessary to overcome any issues that may arise and will see the efforts to restore genuine national unity through to the end. Meanwhile, the international community must lend its support to the process.

As a sponsor of the peace process and an active participant in the Quartet, the Russian Federation will continue to contribute to breaking the impasse in the Middle East peace process, including through contacts with involved States of the region. Our proposal to President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu, who have been visiting us separately on a regular basis, to convene a summit in Moscow is still on the table. The situation we have now can lead to only one conclusion, which is that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, like other urgent current issues, can be resolved only through a collective effort. There continues to be no alternative to the Quartet as a mediation mechanism for this issue, in concert with key States of the region.

Unfortunately, other serious conflicts continue in the Middle East, although we should not allow them to overshadow the issue of a Palestinian-Israeli settlement. The Russian Federation is of the view that inter- and intra-State disputes should be resolved through direct political dialogue. We have been making active efforts to stabilize the situation in the region and put an end to hostilities, while at the same time combating terrorist groups, providing humanitarian assistance to those in need, helping to improve socioeconomic situations and promoting political settlements of crises in the Middle East.

Thanks to the decisive role played by the Russian air force, Government forces have cleared Syrian territory of fighters belonging to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). We have succeeded in preserving Syria as a sovereign State, creating the conditions for the return of refugees and internally displaced persons and for launching efforts for a political settlement to the Syrian crisis in earnest, under the auspices of the United Nations. That specific effort will be further supported by the Syrian national dialogue to be held in Sochi from 29 to 30 January, which we hope will bring a new impetus to the Geneva process. After the Sochi meeting, within the Geneva format and with the consent of the Syrian parties, agreements should be drawn up on constitutional reform and elections, under United Nations supervision, as outlined in resolution 2254 (2015) and affirmed in the Da Nang statement of 11 November 2017 by the Presidents of the Russian Federation and the United States and the Sochi declaration of 22 November 2017 by the leaders of Iran, Russia and Turkey.

The liberation of Iraq from ISIL was a pivotal moment, enabling the country to focus on national reconciliation and on rebuilding the infrastructure destroyed in the war against ISIL. We hope that Iraq can resolve its issues and that relations between Baghdad and Erbil will be restored so as to stabilize the

national political situation and enable Iraq to develop as a sovereign and territorially intact State.

The situation in Libya remains complicated, although there have been glimmers recently leading to hopes that the impasse in the political settlement process to date can finally be overcome.

We continue to be gravely concerned about the situation in Yemen. The country's economy is virtually paralysed, major parts of its civilian infrastructure have been destroyed and the people are living with hunger and large-scale epidemics. We welcome the humanitarian efforts undertaken by the United Nations and Member States, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and others. The Russian Federation is also helping to aid the people of Yemen. One thing is obvious, however, which is that the situation cannot be improved until the peace process is resumed. The international community should also do everything possible to maintain stability in Lebanon.

It will be crucial to ensure that steps to improve the situation in the Persian Gulf are taken as soon as possible. The mutual recriminations and accusations should give way to the launch of a regional process establishing confidence-building measures, while the potential in that regard of resolution 598 (1987), adopted as long ago as 1987, is still untapped.

We would like to underscore that the current situation in the Middle East and North Africa reflects the importance of concerted international cooperation and the adoption of a united agenda. We must strive to unite our efforts to combat terrorism and consolidate our approaches to resolving the serious crises in the region. In that context, we believe that the initiative of Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Russia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, to hold a comprehensive review in the Security Council of the situation in the Middle East remains relevant. In that regard, I agree with Mrs. Haley. Like her, we are ready to discuss the situation as a whole. Russia is prepared to participate in such efforts with all interested partners. We maintain friendly and equitable relations with every State in the Middle East without exception, relations that are not marred by negative instances of interference in internal affairs. Incidentally, just for the record, it is not only in the Middle East that we refrain from interfering in others' internal affairs, and we advise others to do the same.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing.

China has listened carefully to the statements of the representatives of Palestine and Israel. The question of Palestine is fundamental to the Middle East issue and is crucial to the issue of achieving peace in the Middle East. The current Palestinian-Israeli situation remains fragile, with heightened tensions. The humanitarian situation in Gaza remains grim. China calls on the Security Council and the international community to remain united and to work with a greater sense of urgency to promote a political settlement to the question of Palestine, which is in the fundamental interests of both Palestinians and Israelis and is what the region and the world are waiting for.

The right approach to finding a political settlement of the question of Palestine is through a two-State solution. The international community must remain committed to the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative, and must step up its efforts to see negotiations resumed so as to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace through dialogue and negotiation, without delay.

China has always firmly supported and promoted the Middle East peace process. We support the just cause of the Palestinian people in their desire to see their legitimate national rights restored. We support the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent State of Palestine, based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. China's position on that issue will not change. Last July, with the aim of helping to promote a settlement of the question of Palestine, President Xi Jinping of China put forward a four-point proposal calling for the promotion of a political process based on a two-State solution; adherence to a shared, comprehensive, united and sustainable security concept; improved coordination of international efforts to rally support for peace; and implementation of a holistic approach promoting peace through development. On that basis, China will endeavour to play a constructive role in promoting a solution to the Palestinian question.

The issue of Jerusalem is complex and sensitive, and is at the very heart of a solution to the question of Palestine. Over the years, the issue of Jerusalem has been addressed in many Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). Its status has come under intense scrutiny recently. China believes that efforts to address the issue should be based on the following points.

First, Jerusalem's diverse history must be respected. It involves very complex historical, religious and ethnic factors. Its status must be dealt with based on respect for the various religious and ethnic sensitivities. We must avoid any simplified approaches to the issue.

Secondly, equity and fairness should be ensured. Only through a fair approach that accommodates the views of all of the parties concerned will it be possible to find a solution that they will accept.

Thirdly, the international consensus on the issue must be implemented. The status of Jerusalem must be decided by the parties concerned on the basis of final-status negotiations. That international consensus has been developed through the various political and legal instruments, including the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Fourthly, we need peaceful coexistence. Jerusalem is the common home of different ethnicities and religions. Palestine and Israel must respect each other's right to existence and avoid taking actions that might further escalate the situation.

At present, the Middle East region is in turmoil. The occupied Palestinian territories are facing even greater security and humanitarian challenges, especially in Gaza, where the humanitarian crisis has worsened. The international community must not forget millions of Palestinian refugees, to whom humanitarian assistance must continue to be provided. We call upon the parties to scale up their support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and to countries that have hosted Palestinian refugees — including Lebanon, Jordan and Syria — so as to ease the pressure that these refugees have been facing.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I join others in thanking Mr. Mladenov for his briefing and dedicated work. Mr. Mladenov's statement was accurate and clear, yet not encouraging — recent developments are reason for concern.

I align myself with the statement to be delivered later by the observer of the European Union (EU).

The Kingdom of the Netherlands remains firmly committed to the two-State solution, based on known parameters. This also applies to the status of Jerusalem. A two-State solution is the only viable way of fulfilling the aspirations of Israelis and Palestinians alike, to live in peace, security and dignity. We welcome the initiatives taken by the EU High Representative. This includes receiving Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas and convoking an additional meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians on 31 January in Brussels, together with Norway.

Allow me to focus on three main aspects of the issue at hand: negative developments on the ground, the need for positive steps and the role of the international community.

First of all, the Kingdom of the Netherlands is concerned about developments on the ground that continue to undermine the prospect of a two-State solution. Tensions have increased over the past two months. We condemn all acts of violence, including the firing of rockets from Gaza, the killing of an Israeli citizen in the West Bank on 9 January and the cynical use by militants of the crossing at Kerem Shalom/Karm Abu Salem as a cover for building a tunnel. There is no justification for terrorism.

At the same time, we are concerned by the high number of Palestinian casualties in protests and confrontations in the past months. The response to violence should be proportionate. Both sides must work to prevent further escalation. The Kingdom of the Netherlands strongly opposes the recent Israeli announcements on settlement expansion. Settlements are illegal under international law and constitute an obstacle to peace. Furthermore, we are concerned that the amendment made by the Knesset to the Basic Law: Jerusalem, Capital of Israel, on 2 January will make an agreement on Jerusalem as shared capital of both States more difficult.

Secondly, both parties should urgently take significant positive steps to build confidence and improve the situation on the ground. This is hard work; it requires leadership and political will, but it needs to be done. We call upon Israel to freeze its expansion of settlements and to enable the strengthening of the Palestinian Authority. We urge Palestinian leaders to condemn terrorist attacks, to continue security cooperation and to proceed on the challenging path of intra-Palestinian reconciliation. Both sides should refrain from unhelpful and inciting statements, as witnessed over the past couple of weeks.

Thirdly, a political horizon for the two-State solution is needed, in line with relevant Council resolutions, including resolutions 2334 (2016) and 478 (1980). To

that end, cooperation among Quartet partners as well as regional partners is crucial. Unilateral steps are unhelpful. Instead, we have to work together in order to prevent the irreversible loss of the two-State solution and to help parties to find a path back to the negotiation table. In this regard, the Kingdom of the Netherlands looks forward to the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians to address the situation in Gaza. My country will continue to use its good relations with both sides to play a constructive role. That includes facilitating practical steps in the field of energy, water and crossings. As an example, Dutch-funded container scanners are facilitating Palestinian trade, while Israeli security concerns are taken into account.

Let me also underline the importance of the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We should not politicize humanitarian aid. The Kingdom of the Netherlands has been a strong supporter of UNRWA over the years and will remain so, especially in view of the current difficulties. We firmly believe UNRWA plays a key role as a United Nations humanitarian organization to provide basic health care, education and emergency relief to Palestine refugees. Especially in the Palestinian territories, its role is indispensable, as UNRWA provides 50 per cent of all humanitarian aid. UNRWA's work is also indispensable in the challenging environment of Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. With these activities, UNRWA is critical to stability in the region. In view of our concerns regarding UNRWA's financial situation, my country has decided to frontload its contribution to UNRWA for 2018. We encourage others to join us in supporting UNRWA and to contribute as soon as possible.

Let me also draw attention to another regional issue of major concern to us — the negative impact of Hizbullah interfering in regional conflicts. Hizbullah poses a real risk of further destabilizing that already volatile region. It should disarm, in compliance with resolution 1701 (2006), and cease its destabilizing behaviour.

Let me add a final point concerning the situation in Yemen, which is also an issue of major concern for the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This issue will be a priority for us during our tenure in the Council this year. All parties in Yemen should comply with international humanitarian law and should at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants. I would like to repeat the call of the Council in its press statement of 22 December for the parties to allow the safe, rapid and unhindered access for humanitarian supplies, personnel and other essential imports. We welcome the announced improvements to infrastructure, which are crucial for the adequate delivery of international assistance. Al-Hudaydah is key in that regard; we reiterate the need for its permanent and unconditional opening. At the same time, all parties to the conflict should constructively engage with the Special Envoy to create opportunities for dialogue. That is what the people of Yemen deserve.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue to be a partner for peace, justice and development for the region, with a particular focus on its people.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his valuable briefing on recent developments in the Middle East peace process.

Our participation in this meeting is of special importance to us because it is the first we are attending on the Palestinian issue during our non-permanent membership of the Security Council. It is a cause that represents one of the priorities for Kuwaiti foreign policy, in line with our principled, firm and historical position in support of the Palestinian people, their rights and their struggle to put an end to Israeli occupation and to achieve all of their legitimate political rights and establish their independent State on their territory, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

It is incumbent upon us, as members of the Security Council and emanating from our responsibility to maintain international peace and security, to insist on the implementation of the Council's resolutions, which are binding upon all Member States, as per Article 25 of the Charter of the United Nations. We must not allow any party to any conflict to shirk the implementation of those resolutions by invoking numerous excuses that are mainly unrealistic, reveal a lack of political will and show disregard for United Nations resolutions and for international legitimacy. Israel, the occupying Power, is in material breach of Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). Israel continues to pursue its aggressive policies, unilateral measures and provocations that run counter to Security Council resolutions and international conventions.

Israel's violations occur as a result of the absence of any call or serious demand by the Security Council upon it to end its continued acts of aggression and to abide by its international obligations as the occupying Power, in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. The arrests, the demolition of homes, the destruction of property and the unprecedented expansion in the building of illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, have led to the forced eviction of Palestinian civilians and casualties. Those actions have become a daily routine for the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian question is basically embodied in the occupation, of which the international community is seized. The aim is to end the occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories in order to resolve the issue through a two-State solution, within the 4 June 1967 borders. To that end, there exist manifold initiatives agreements, and international conventions. Security Council resolutions have become an integral part of international law, which is indispensable in international relations. In that regard, we welcome the role played by the General Assembly and the Security Council last month in demanding an end to the occupation, rejecting all unilateral measures, reaffirming the importance of a two-State solution and calling for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In addition, the United Nations has reaffirmed the basic principles pertaining to this conflict, including the need to respect the special status of Jerusalem and nullifying any measure aimed at changing its status without an agreement that arises from a comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, in accordance with resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 476 (1980), 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016). That is why the adoption of any unilateral measure or any attempt to impose a new fait accompli is a de facto violation of international law and of the relevant Security Council resolutions. Such measures constitute a very dangerous development in the situation, the repercussions of which will only further exacerbate feelings of frustrations, which in turn will fuel extremism and directly affect regional security and stability. It is neither realistic nor acceptable to believe that unilateral decisions will succeed in resolving this conflict.

In discussing the Palestinian question, we must mention some shining moments that serve to underscore the pivotal role of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, which offer all forms of support and assistance to the Palestinian people, who have a just and righteous cause and have lived under Israeli occupation for over 50 years.

That is why it is appropriate to mention the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), one of the oldest and most successful United Nations agencies in practical terms. It contributed, and continues to contribute, to stability in the Middle East. The State of Kuwait highlights the need for all donor States to commit to providing the necessary funding to UNRWA in order to enable it continue providing its vital services to the refugees and to maintain the nature of its work and activities, which are humanitarian and devoid of any politicization. In that regard, we reiterate our support for UNRWA's activities, to which we have pledged $7.9 million in the past two months. We would also like to thank the donor States that recently took the initiative to submit their contributions so as to shrink the deficit in the agency's budget.

Kuwait reiterates its solidarity with the brotherly Palestinian people in defending their just cause and legitimate rights, including their historic and well-grounded rights in Jerusalem, which are guaranteed by the relevant international resolutions. We underscore that East Jerusalem is the capital of the State of Palestine, and call on States to recognize the State of Palestine, and occupied East Jerusalem as its capital. We support all legal and peaceful steps taken by the State of Palestine at the national and international levels in order to entrench its sovereignty over Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the occupied Palestinian territory.

In conclusion, I should like to announce that the State of Kuwait, during its presidency of the Security Council next month, intends to convene an Arria Formula meeting, in cooperation with a group of Security Council members, to discuss the status of the Palestinian people after 50 years of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): At the outset, I thank Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing and, more importantly, for the work that he and his team do on the ground, which is extremely important.

Sweden aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later by the observer of the European Union.

I want to first reiterate our long-standing and firm commitment to the two-State solution. There is simply no alternative. Only a two-State solution, based on known parameters, international law and relevant resolutions of the Council, can fulfil the legitimate aspirations of Israelis and Palestinians alike and achieve the security and just peace that both peoples deserve.

Yet, developments on the ground continue to deteriorate. Rapid settlement expansion, challenges to the international consensus on the status of Jerusalem and the shrinking space for civil society in both Israel and Palestine continue to undermine the prospects for peace. The continued and rapid Israeli settlement expansion, including in East Jerusalem, and the gradual fragmentation of the West Bank seriously undermine efforts to relaunch the peace process and the viability of the two-State solution. Settlements constitute a flagrant violation under international law and of the Council's resolutions, including its latest resolution 2334 (2016).

We are also deeply concerned by Israeli legislative initiatives and policies that risk prejudging future negotiations and undermining the prospects for a two-State solution. This is particularly true when it comes to legislation and policies that would undermine the status of Jerusalem, including the continued policy of revoking the residency rights of Palestinians, in violation of international humanitarian law.

The position of the European Union and Sweden on Jerusalem was stated clearly last month. Jerusalem is the future capital of both States. We call upon all Member States to continue to respect the international consensus on Jerusalem embodied in, inter alia, resolution 478 (1980), including on the location of diplomatic representations, until the final status of Jerusalem is resolved.

Furthermore, the shrinking space for civil society and the possibility to promote human rights, both on the Palestinian and Israeli sides, is a cause for great concern. On the Palestinian side, we note that laws are sometimes used to curtail freedom of expression, and on the Israeli side we note laws blacklisting representatives of civil society organizations, thereby preventing them from carrying out their important work. A vibrant civil society, particularly the inclusion of women and young people, is critical to democratic development and sustainable peace.

This bleak picture leads me to the conclusion that we must increase our efforts to help relaunch a meaningful peace process that would enable the State of Israel and the State of Palestine to live side by side in peace and security, with Jerusalem as the future capital of both States. To that end, we need an appropriate and effective international framework for negotiations. That framework needs to be multilateral and all relevant actors, particularly countries of the region, need to be engaged. The Council also has a responsibility, not least to uphold international law and its own resolutions. The return to a meaningful process towards a negotiated two-State solution needs to be in line with known parameters. Final-status issues such as Jerusalem and refugees can be taken off the table only as part of negotiations between the parties.

In 1949, the General Assembly established the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and mandated it to provide assistance and protection to what are today some 5 million registered Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip. UNRWA was mandated to carry out this task until a negotiated, lasting and just solution to the Palestine refugee situation was reached. Sadly, we still await that day. It is for this reason that we all must continue to shoulder our responsibility for Palestinian refugees through a functioning UNRWA.

UNRWA delivers critical services for the human development of Palestinian refugees and plays a crucial role in ensuring stability in a region seriously affected by conflict, terrorism and turmoil. Given the extreme conditions facing many refugees, UNRWA's stabilizing role in providing basic services is imperative. Furthermore, the work of UNRWA is essential to preserving the possibility of a two-State solution, as refugees are one of the final-status issues. With a current shortfall of $243 million, UNRWA is facing its most acute financial crisis since its inception. Vital UNRWA operations and programmes will be immediately at risk unless extraordinary measures are taken. A reduction or termination of UNRWA operations would have serious and immediate negative consequences on the ground, causing instability.

UNRWA has undertaken key reforms at unprecedented speed, and as a result has achieved a high level of cost efficiency in its operations and programmes. Through reforms in 2015 and 2016, last year it saved $81 million. We therefore call upon all Member States to consider enhancing their support to UNRWA. Our own contributions last year amounted to

some $65 million, making us its fourth-largest donor. In light of the acute financial crisis, and at the request of UNRWA, we have advanced our initial payment for 2018 to the Agency, and we urge others to do that same.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to thank Special Coordinator Nikolay Mladenov for his briefing, which as always was comprehensive and precise, and for his personal commitment and that of his team.

The scenario we have just heard described recalls a reality that the Council must not be distracted from. While crises have been increasing in the Middle East for several years, the oldest conflict in the region remains unresolved. However, time has not made the Israeli-Palestinian conflict less dangerous. On the contrary, the situation prevailing on the ground is a false status quo, marked by a daily deterioration, linked in particular to settlement activity and more generally the occupation. The situation could degenerate into an open crisis at any time, in Gaza as well as in Jerusalem.

Decade after decade, peace is receding not only on the ground, but also in speeches and in minds, as successive generations Palestinians and Israelis lose hope of a resolution of the conflict. There are two narratives, the bridges between which are increasingly rare and unstable. By promoting ignorance of the other party, this threatens to mechanically fuel antagonism between them.

The deadly crises erupting across the region have not resulted in trivializing or marginalizing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Through its symbolic dimension, its regional echo and its place in the collective imagination, the conflict retains its central and mobilizing character. Its reach goes far beyond the borders of Israel and the Palestinian territories. The permanence of the occupation and the tensions it generates offer an unhoped-for argument for recruitment to terrorist groups active in the region. And any escalation on the ground carries the risk of uncontrollable regional consequences.

The paradox lies in the fact that, while the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is now the oldest of those tearing the Middle East apart, it is also the only one whose solution is so well known and shared by the international community. The solution is based on the vision of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. The destinies of Israelis and Palestinians are intimately linked; neither of the two peoples will achieve its national aspirations on a lasting basis at the expense of the other. That is why the clash of narratives that are hermetically irreconcilable to which I referred earlier is so dangerous.

We note the commitment of the United States to seeking a resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations for a final-status agreement. It is now up to the United States to make proposals to that effect, which we hope will be part of the framework agreed by the international community, on which all our peace efforts are built. This was recalled by President Emmanuel Macron during his recent talks with Benjamin Netanyahu and Mahmoud Abbas. It was also recalled by French Minister for Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian at the meeting of the European Union Foreign Ministers with Mahmoud Abbas in Brussels on 22 January. On that occasion, the Palestinian President reaffirmed his commitment to a peace based on the principle of two States.

There is no credible alternative to the internationally agreed parameters, which themselves are based on international law. Let me recall these parameters once again: two States living in peace and security within secure and recognized borders; borders drawn on the basis of the 1967 lines, with mutually agreed exchanges of territories; Jerusalem as the future capital of those two States; and a concerted, realistic and fair solution for Palestinian refugees. In that context, a regional approach and economic incentives could be important complements to a peace agreement, but cannot replace it. Today we are at a crossroads, at a critical moment when each of the parameters I have just listed has been weakened.

With regard to the 1967 lines, the settlement of Palestinian territories and all accompanying legislative and administrative measures are imposing another reality on the ground. There are 600,000 settlers today, 200,000 of them in East Jerusalem. The 2017 year was a record year for settlement activity, and since the beginning of this year announcements of nearly 1,800 housing units have already been made. Many involve settlements deep in West Bank territory, including the approval of the construction of seven structures on private Palestinian land in a so-called outpost, which is illegal even under Israeli law and which the Israeli Supreme Court has ordered to be dismantled. The position of France is clear. We condemn settlement activity in all its forms. It is illegal under international law, as recalled in resolution 2334 (2016). It is counterproductive and even dangerous, since it

destroys or, the ground the possibility of two States and undermines trust between the parties.

On Jerusalem, our position is well known, as we recently had the opportunity to recall in detail. The status of Jerusalem will have to be determined by the parties within the framework of a peace agreement. Under such a future agreement, the city is destined to become the capital of two States, Israel and Palestine. In the absence of agreement, in accordance with the consensus that has prevailed for 70 years within the international community, France does recognizes no sovereignty over Jerusalem. As French authorities at the highest level have indicated, we disagree with the United States announcements of late last year, which deviate from this international consensus and relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 478 (1980). Similarly, we regret the adoption early this year of an Israeli law on Jerusalem that will make it much more difficult to share Jerusalem as part of a future peace agreement.

Finally, the situation of the Palestinian refugee camps is a time bomb in the Palestinian territories and in particular in Gaza, as well as in the region. Until we have been able to achieve a just and realistic solution to the refugee issue under an Israeli-Palestinian agreement, the provision of basic assistance and services by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to more than 5 millions of Palestinian refugees will be indispensable. This is of course a humanitarian requirement, especially through the provision of health services and food aid. Just as importantly, it is also a question of human development. Through the network of UNRWA schools and the role of the agency in job creation, it represents the very possibility of a preserving a future for a population that, as we know, is particularly young.

Lastly, that assistance is essential for the security and stability of the region. An interruption in UNRWA's services could lead to an escalation in Gaza as well as to security implications in refugee-hosting countries of the region, in particular in Lebanon, where the financial situation of UNRWA is now critical. The weaker UNRWA is, the more terrorist groups can use Palestinian refugee camps as recruitment grounds. Recent announcements of a partial freeze and a reduced scope of the United States contribution to UNRWA are therefore of great concern to us. The United States is a key contributor to UNRWA, and the role it has played in financing the Agency for decades is decisive. We urge them not to give up that role and not to weaken the regional stabilization tool represented by UNRWA. Apart from the United States role in the peace process, we call on them to maintain an assistance that is as necessary for the Palestinians as it is for security in the region.

In the difficult context I have just described, I want to solemnly reiterate that there is no viable alternative to the two-State solution. The single State that some put forward as a possible answer to the current deadlock would lead to two parallel citizenship regimes in the same territory, thereby creating an unequal situation that would be unacceptable in principle and catastrophic in its consequences. Such a situation would represent a double impasse: for the Palestinians, the abandonment of their aspirations for a State; for the Israelis, the ruin of their national democratic project.

An urgent need today is to provide Israelis and Palestinians with a political horizon by actively working to restore the hope of both States and the possibility of negotiation between the parties. The extraordinary meeting to be held in Brussels on 31 January of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, which brings together the main economic supporters of the Palestinians, should be an opportunity to reiterate the commitment of the parties and of the international community, politically and financially, to the two-State solution. We need everyone's commitment to that end, beginning with the United States as a major partner.

Nevertheless, there will be no lasting political solution without unity between Gaza and the West Bank under the authority of the legitimate Palestinian institutions and within the framework of the principles endorsed by the Palestine Liberation Organization. In that regard, we reiterate our commitment to the implementation of the agreement signed in Cairo on 12 October by Fatah and Hamas, which should enable the Palestinian Authority to fully exercise its prerogatives in the Gaza Strip, including in the area of safety. That process must result in a rapid improvement of the living conditions of the population in Gaza. It must also be accompanied by a lifting of the blockade, as well as credible security guarantees for Israel.

France is a friend to both Palestinians and Israelis. That is why we must speak frankly to them, as real friends would expect, and call on them to take courageous measures to allow for the resumption of negotiations. There is no shortcut in the demanding path to peace,

a route requiring negotiation based on the parameters I have recalled here. Whatever the difficulties, France does not intend to give up on that goal and will play its full part in the efforts to achieve it.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We are grateful to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, which was very helpful, as always.

The peace and security situation in the Middle East remains a matter of serious concern for international peace and security. Issues ranging from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the Syrian and Yemeni crises and the situation in Libya have dominated much of our discussion in the Security Council over the past year. The combined effects of long-standing and unresolved disputes, the challenges of governance, the effect for a long time time of low oil prices and economic stagnation, the youth bulge and high rates of unemployment, the collapse of State institutions, sectarian strife, geopolitical rivalry, the threat of terrorism and violent extremism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including the use of chemical weapons, a massive influx of refugees and migrants, and humanitarian crises have been threatening to destabilize the whole region, with enormous consequences for international peace and security.

The geostrategic importance of the Middle East region is well known. But for us in the Horn of Africa the situation in that region has a direct implication for our peace and stability. We are already witnessing the impact of the Gulf crisis in our region, and the fallout from the Yemeni conflict is being felt across the Red Sea. The fact that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Da'esh is trying to establish cells in Somalia has been a major concern in that regard. More broadly, however, that there are developments taking place that could potentially undermine the gains made in recent years, and further complicate peace and security in the Horn of Africa region, is very clear. We believe that requires serious attention and follow-up.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been one of those disputes at the core of the dangerous situation that has essentially defined the Middle East for the past several decades. The conflict has been compounded further by the recent conflicts plaguing other countries of the region. Unfortunately, peace has so far remained elusive, to the detriment of all as well as to the peace and stability of the Middle East region.

The same known obstacles to the removal of the logjam to peace persist, with no movement forward to speak of — a situation that is hardly conducive to sustainable peace and security for all concerned. In the meantime, the quest for justice keeps being postponed, with all its implications. Without genuine efforts towards removing those obstacles, there cannot be any meaningful progress towards realizing the two-State solution.

Our position on the Israeli-Palestinian dispute has always been consistent and, we believe, principled. As much as we support the right of Israel to exist in peace and security, we also support the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the right of Palestine to exist as a free and independent State. Accordingly, we fully support the goal of two States living side by side in peace and security as the only viable option to resolving the Israeli- Palestinian dispute. We believe that is not only in the best interests of both Israel and Palestine, but it will also significantly advance peace and security in the Middle East region.

Any obstacle to that goal should be addressed in order to pave the way for progress in the peace talks. While it is the parties that should show flexibility to engage in direct and meaningful negotiation to reach a final settlement on all issues, we believe the international community, and in particular the Security Council, should help and encourage the two sides to do so. That is all the more timely and urgent in the light of the circumstances of the moment. At a time when terrorism is a major challenge in the region and sectarian violence is on the rise, the absence of any meaningful progress will be a recipe for disaster and increase further radicalization, which creates favourable conditions for extremists to thrive.

Therefore, it is imperative that the two sides resume direct and meaningful negotiation to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting solution, on the basis of mutual trust and a spirit of compromise, that ensures Israel's security and Palestinian aspirations for statehood. That is what the situation calls for, and it is in the best interests of the two parties as well as of the international community as a whole. We hope that the extraordinary meeting of the international donor group for Palestine, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, that is expected to convene in Brussels by the end of

this month will provide an opportunity to bring all the parties together to discuss measures to speed up efforts that can underpin a negotiated two-State solution.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation thanks Mr. Mladenov for his briefing today.

We once again are participating in an open debate on the subject of the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. The truth is that the reality of the Palestinian people — with more than 5 million of them living as refugees; the inhumane conditions experienced by those living in the Gaza Strip, who have been subjugated to a heinous blockade by the Israeli occupying Power for nearly 10 years; and the increasing number of illegal settlements — is, to the say the least, discouraging, and there does not seem to be a solution in sight. In addition to that, hundreds of adolescents and children have been abducted and incarcerated in Israeli jails in violation of international law, for example, as Mr. Mladenov pointed out, in the case of Ahed Tamimi.

My delegation categorically rejects the blatant intention of the Government of Israel, the occupying Power, to build settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. A little more than a week ago, the Israeli Minister for Defence announced to the press the plan to build 1,285 new settlements in the West Bank. That announcement translates into a direct violation of resolution 2334 (2016), as well as many other resolutions adopted by the Security Council and by the General Assembly that reiterate that the establishment of settlements in Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal basis, is a flagrant violation of international law and presents a major obstacle to achieving the two-State solution and a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.

We also wish to express our concern about the decision of the Government of the United States to cut financing to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We believe that such a decision significantly affects the humanitarian support that the Agency provides to the nearly 5 million Palestinian men and women currently registered with UNRWA. We echo the statement of Secretary-General António Guterres of 16 January that the services provided by UNRWA are of great importance not only for the welfare of the population, but also as a major factor for ensuring stability. Reducing funding only serves to deny them the right to access basic services — such as education, health and emergency relief — for a people who since 1948 has been dispossessed of its land, homes, farms and, ultimately, its entire history. We therefore commend the decision of the Kingdom of Sweden, which has taken the initiative speed up its contribution of $58.5 million to UNRWA. We have no doubt that that support will certainly to some extent alleviate the impact of the hardships affecting Palestinian refugee men and women.

Bolivia once again expresses to the international community its firm condemnation of the decision of the United States Government to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, as it constitutes a flagrant violation of various Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, including resolution 478 (1980), which calls on States to withdraw their diplomatic missions from Jerusalem. The decision serves only to undermine any possibility for dialogue between the parties and significantly delays arriving at a peaceful and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As a pacifist country, Bolivia believes that the only option for ensuring a just and lasting peaceful conclusion to the conflict between Israel and Palestine is through dialogue and negotiations, with clear expressions of political will by both parties, so as to achieve the two-State solution, concerning which we pledge our full commitment to multilateralism and respect for international law.

We express our firm commitment to supporting all the international efforts leading to the peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In that regard, we subscribe to initiatives such as the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and all others that ensure achieving a just and lasting peace so that both peoples can live within recognized and secure borders. Bolivia believes that the only long-term option for resolving the conflict is the two-State solution, with the establishment of a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State, within the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, pursuant to the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Allow me to conclude my intervention by quoting from the speech by Anwar Al-Sadat made on 20 November 1977 in the Knesset, which was referred to earlier.

(*spoke in English*)

> "Conceive with me a peace agreement in Geneva that we would herald to a world thirsting for peace, a peace agreement based on the following points: ending the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories occupied in 1967; the achievement of the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people and their right to self-determination, including their right to establish their own State; and the right of all states in the area to live in peace within their boundaries".

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): At the outset, let me thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his very comprehensive briefing.

I align myself with the statement to be made on behalf of the European Union (EU).

Poland firmly supports all initiatives aimed at stabilization and strengthening peace and security in the Middle East. Unfortunately, since our last quarterly debate in October 2017 (see S/PV. 8072), the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has not seen any significant progress towards achieving peace. Therefore, we must maintain our commitment to resolving one of the longest-standing conflicts on our agenda. We should continue to seek an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by reviving the peace process. Only a return to meaningful bilateral negotiations based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law can have a positive impact on the process. That is the only way towards a two-State solution and resolving all final status issues. At the same time, we encourage the parties to the conflict to take action so as to achieve reconciliation and safeguard the dignity and sanctity of the holy sites, particularly in Jerusalem.

In line with the long-standing position of the EU, we strongly believe that the aspirations concerning Jerusalem of both parties must be fulfilled, and a way to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of both States must be found through negotiations. We will continue to respect the international consensus on Jerusalem embodied, inter alia, in resolution 478 (1980), including with regard to diplomatic representation until the final status of the city is resolved. While recognizing the special significance of the holy sites of Jerusalem, Poland also strongly believes that the status quo established in 1967 concerning the Temple Mount must be maintained in line with previous understandings and with respect to Jordan's special role.

Reaching a peace agreement is possible only through peace talks based on international law and the principles governing peaceful relations among States A key element in that context would be a meaningful dialogue among the three main monotheistic religions. We support the two-State solution and hope that the national aspirations of both parties to the conflict will be met, including Palestine's right to self-determination and independence, as well as Israel's right to ensure its security and achieve the normalization of relations with Arab States. We call on both sides to refrain from unilateral steps that pre-empt the outcome of final status negotiations. We expect them to demonstrate their commitment to peace through their actions and policies. We continue to monitor developments on intra-Palestinian reconciliation closely. We hope that the process will be successful. Nevertheless, we believe that reaching an outcome accepted by the international community could be an important step for the unity of a future Palestinian State and may, over the long-term, lead to a sustainable peace agreement.

We are deeply concerned about the deteriorating financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The effects of reducing support can produce serious security and humanitarian consequences, not only in the Palestinian territories but also in other countries that host refugees. The Agency already faces great challenges in upholding its mandate to preserve key services, such as education and health care for Palestinian refugees. In the absence of a lasting political solution, the international community cannot abdicate its responsibility and duty towards Palestinian refugees, or for ensuring the continuation of the Agency's work on a sound financial basis. For its part, Poland will continue to support UNRWA through its financial contributions.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): Let me begin by reiterating the United Kingdom's long-standing commitment to a two-State solution. We envision an Israeli State and a Palestinian State living peacefully and in security and prosperity, side by side, within secure and recognized borders and with Jerusalem as a shared capital. We call on the parties to take urgent steps to reverse the current negative trends on the ground, refrain from unilateral actions and start renewed and meaningful peace negotiations. We are ready to contribute to all credible efforts to restart the peace process.

Inflammatory rhetoric threatens the mutual trust that is required to break the current deadlock. Statements that demonize or denigrate the Jewish people are wholly unacceptable. There is no place for denying either the Jewish or Palestinian connection to the land. It is important that the Palestinian leadership continue efforts to implement fully the recommendations of the Quartet report (S/2016/595, annex) as regards incitement. Both parties must remain committed to previous diplomatic agreements, which should form the basis of renewed peace negotiations.

We recognize that the Palestinian Central Council recommendation to de-recognize Israel was non-binding, but it is nevertheless wholly unconstructive. We call on the Palestinian leadership not to implement it. Rather, we welcome the Palestinian Authority's continued recognition of the State of Israel and its support for a two-State solution. As always, we urge all parties to promote non-violence and to engage constructively towards a two-State solution as the only basis for a sustainable settlement to the conflict.

To that end, we believe that continued settlement activity and demolitions further undermine the prospects for peace and must be halted, including in East Jerusalem. The pace of settlement construction has regrettably accelerated, notably with the advancement of plans for more than 10,000 settlement units, including the approval of the first new housing units in Hebron in 15 years. The signs from early 2018 are not encouraging. Only two weeks ago, Israel announced the advancement of a further 1,122 housing units across the West Bank. We call on Israel to immediately reverse its policy of settlement expansion in the occupied Palestinian territories. It undermines both the physical viability of the two-State solution and Israel's commitment to it.

We must also continue to support humanitarian efforts to meet the basic needs of the Palestinian people, especially in Gaza, which includes support for the full return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza. We encourage further progress on reconciliation, including with regard to security arrangements and civil service integration, in line with the Quartet principles. We welcome the recent increase in electricity supplies to Gaza as the first of many positive steps required to improve the dire situation.

The United Kingdom remains a fully committed supporter of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and we recognize its unique and important mandate from the General Assembly to provide vital services to the Palestinian refugee population, both in the occupied territories and in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Although we agree that there is an urgent need for UNRWA to become more efficient and cost-effective by stepping up the pace of reform, UNRWA must continue to be able to carry out its important functions. Any unexpected reductions or delays in predicted donor disbursements can have damaging impacts and undermine stability in the region.

Finally, terrorism and incitement pose grave threats to the prospect of the two-State solution and must cease. To have the best chances of success, the peace process must be conducted in an atmosphere free from violence. We note with regret the deaths on both sides in recent days. We were appalled by the terrorist murder of Rabbi Raziel Shevach, in the West Bank on 9 January, and utterly condemn that shameful act. Our thoughts are with his family.

Every Israeli and Palestinian has the right to live in peace and security. We share the desire of the United States and that of others in the Security Council to end the conflict. We continue to support the efforts of the United States Administration to put forward detailed proposals for an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. The United Kingdom stands ready to help implement a viable deal, including by supporting its security provisions, contributing to refugee compensation and enabling flows of trade and investment among the United Kingdom, Israel, a sovereign Palestinian State and its Arab neighbours, which could help transform the region.

To realize that vision, it is time for urgency from all of us. All parties and the international community must work together, in the spirit of compromise and understanding, to make lasting peace a reality. As the late Israeli President Shimon Peres stated, he who has despaired from peace is the one dreaming; whoever gives in and stops seeking peace is naive.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, let me thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, and his team for the comprehensive and detailed briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

which shed light on the overall situation in the Middle East, and on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular.

On 18 December 2017, Mr. Mladenov briefed the Security Council (see S/PV.8138) and stated, inter alia, that no significant progress had been made in the peace process. In the briefing we just heard, not only has no progress been made on the situation in the region, but, owing to developments in 2017, we are witnessing heightened tensions and a worsening of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Equatorial Guinea has been following with particular attention the latest developments in the Middle East, specifically in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, more so now than ever as a member of the Security Council, because this region is of great strategic importance for stability not only in the Middle East but in the entire world. I therefore express the wholehearted commitment of Equatorial Guinea to ensuring stability and peace throughout the region. Equatorial Guinea has always been in favour of a solution based on dialogue to any conflict or problem that could arise, and in this specific case we abide by the same principle.

To achieve the desired stability and peace in this long-suffering area, Palestinians and Israelis must commit themselves to direct, frank dialogue without any preconditions, because only through direct negotiations can an understanding be reached. Such an understanding must lead to the only just solution: that the aspirations of both parties be fulfilled in the framework of two States in which both Israelis and Palestinians live in peace and security. Such negotiations must be conducted in the framework of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the Arab Peace Initiative. The final status of Jerusalem will have to be decided in the framework of these negotiations.

Equatorial Guinea is therefore in favour of a two-State solution that is the result of direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. A just solution based on dialogue may perhaps mean that neither of the two parties will see its aspirations met and claims recognized entirely. That is precisely one of the key aspects of dialogue.

Equatorial Guinea believes that the historical demands of the Palestinians are justified, in line with the various statements of the African Union, but we believe also that Israel is entitled to live in peace and security. Israelis must recognize that just as Israel's right to exist cannot be denied, neither can that of Palestinians to the same. Violence must cease immediately once and for all, and the parties must comply with international legality as enshrined in the various relevant resolutions of the United Nations. The parties must also refrain from any unilateral actions that could undermine dialogue.

We call on the international community to continue with its efforts to promote dialogue between the parties and to eschew steps that could be counterproductive to achieving peaceful coexistence between Palestinians and Israelis.

Given the current situation, it is vital that the Security Council take all necessary initiatives and that no effort be spared to bring the parties involved in the conflict to the negotiating table as the only way to resolve the situation.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the holding of the quarterly open debate of the Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. We thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his enlightening briefing on this issue.

The situation in the Middle East is a persistent source of concern for my country owing to the ongoing grave tensions and the lack of a genuine political process in negotiations and the peace process in the region.

With respect to the question of Palestine, my delegation deplores the entrenchment of present positions that has been seen since the announcement of the recognition by the United States of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the announcement of the transfer of the United States Embassy to that city. The years-long stagnation in the peace process and the current entrenchment of the parties' positions as a result of recent initiatives in the region are liable to permanently undermine the international community's efforts in seeking a two-State solution with two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, with mutual recognition of the legitimate rights of each.

Côte d'Ivoire reaffirms its support for the two-State solution as the sole viable solution to enable the Palestinian and Israeli peoples to coexist in peace and security.

The final status of the city of Jerusalem must be negotiated within the framework of a concerted solution between the two parties, as set out in the relevant United Nations resolutions. My country urges the international

community to persevere in its efforts with the two parties with the aim of arriving at a lasting peace in the Middle East. Furthermore, we call upon Israeli and Palestinian actors to engage in constructive dialogue so as remove any obstacles by abandoning any unilateral action or initiative that could further dim the prospects for a political settlement of the Palestine question based on peace in the Middle East.

In this regard, Côte d'Ivoire my delegation deplores the recent decision of the United States to reduce Washington's contribution to the funding of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. My delegation encourages Hamas and the Palestinian Authority to continue dialogue aimed at bringing about Palestinian unity, which would enable an effective restoration of Palestinian central authority in Gaza and help to mitigate the consequences of the crisis for the people.

To that end, Côte d'Ivoire calls for openness on the part of the Palestinian authorities to dialogue with neighbouring countries, with a view to pacifying the situation, specifically concerning the hosting of Palestine refugees for an inclusive management of the humanitarian crisis in line with the relevant provisions of international humanitarian law.

As the war in Syria enters its seventh consecutive year, my country remains gravely alarmed by the potential spillover of the conflict, which has been characterized by numerous violations of human rights and humanitarian law and the repeated use of the parties of chemical weapons, with full impunity. My delegation condemns any use of chemical weapons, which jeopardizes the security of us all. We call for unity among members of the Security Council, so that the perpetrators of such acts can be identified, prosecuted and punished.

To that end, Côte d'Ivoire, as other Member States have done, calls upon the relevant United Nations structures, specifically the Fact-Finding Mission, to shed light on the circumstances surrounding the use of these weapons in order to enable the relevant legal bodies to take action. In that vein, my country supports the establishment of a consensus-based mechanism to address the issue of the responsibility of and accountability for the parties to the conflict.

In this regard, Côte d'Ivoire commends France for having launched on 23 January last in Paris an initiative entitled "International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons", which reflects the shared will of the international community to deliver an adequate response to the issue of the use of chemical weapons in conflict and the need to hold perpetrators accountable.

We reiterate our full willingness to cooperate with every initiative aimed at contributing to the international community's efforts in the area of the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and combating the use of chemical weapons in conflicts.

With regard to the humanitarian situation in Syria, we welcome the extension for an additional year of the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the delivery of cross-border humanitarian assistance to the besieged areas. We urge all the parties to cease all hostilities in the so-called de-escalation areas in order to enable unfettered access for humanitarian convoys so that they can alleviate the suffering of the people. Regarding the political process, we welcome all initiatives designed to encourage the parties to engage in dialogue with a view to reaching a peaceful and definitive settlement of the Syrian crisis within the Geneva process.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Peru welcomes today's meeting for our quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East. We would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his detailed and comprehensive presentation.

This being our first statement on this subject in our capacity as a non-permanent member of the Council, we want to emphasize our concern about the situation in the Middle East and to reiterate our commitment to finding a solution to the question of Palestine that will help to achieve sustainable peace in the region. In that regard, we would like to highlight three aspects.

First, Peru, guided by its commitment to multilateralism, international law and the peaceful settlement of disputes, supports a two-State solution within internationally recognized and secure borders, to be negotiated directly between Israel and Palestine on the basis of the 1967 borders. The negotiations should also determine the final status of Jerusalem. In 1947, Peru was one of the 11 member countries of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine that recommended the establishment of two States, which was reflected in the General Assembly's adoption that year of its historic resolution 181 (II). Peru was one of the 33 countries that voted in favour of it. In that regard,

I would like to cite part of the renowned Peruvian jurist and diplomat Alberto Ulloa Sotomayor's statement in support of Peru's position:

> "We believe that the best solution consists in the formation of two States in which the corresponding majorities are respected."

On the basis of that principled position, Peru has developed excellent relations of friendship and cooperation with the States of Israel and Palestine that reflect and strengthen the historical bonds established and promoted by our country's Jewish and Arab-Palestinian communities. We want to emphasize that, 70 years after the adoption of resolution 181 (II), the solution to the question of Palestine has not changed. As the Secretary-General said recently, "There is no alternative to the two-State solution. There is no plan B."

Secondly, if we are to resolve the question of Palestine and promote sustainable peace in the Middle East, we have to act in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations. The trust and credibility required for any negotiation in good faith necessarily involves respect for the rule of law and for minimum standards of peaceful coexistence. In that regard, we urge the parties that are directly involved to cease, investigate and punish all violations of human rights or international humanitarian law, all acts of terrorism and all attacks on civilians. We must reject hate speech, anti-Semitism and discrimination in any form. Ethnic, cultural and religious diversity should be appreciated as values for all societies, and should never be seen as threats.

Peru recognizes the right of Israel to safeguard its own security and existence through legitimate self-defence, in accordance with the principles of proportionality and legality. We would also like to recall in that regard the obligation to comply with Security Council resolutions. In line with resolution 2334 (2016), we consider it particularly urgent to end the practices, which have increased during the past year, of building settlements, demolishing buildings and evicting residents in the occupied Palestinian territories.

We want to recognize and encourage the efforts of the various stakeholders aimed at arriving at a sustainable peace between Israel and Palestine. We welcome the willingness that various countries, particularly those that have historically been participants in the process, have expressed to contribute their good offices in that regard. We would like to highlight the efforts of the Quartet and the Arab Peace Initiative. We also welcome the Secretary-General's readiness to promote the parties' resumption of negotiations. We especially encourage the peoples of Israel and Palestine, their political and religious leaders, and all those with the capacity for influence, to act responsibly and to encourage moderation, détente, commitment and dialogue. We have been attentively following the Palestinian Authority's process of restoring control of the Gaza Strip, which we hope will alleviate the humanitarian crisis in that area and help to relaunch the peace process.

Lastly, we would like to acknowledge the important work being done by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East. We consider it important to support it and provide it with stable and predictable financing.

In conclusion, we want to say that Peru will continue to strongly support all initiatives aimed at building the peace and security that Israelis and Palestinians deserve and that the whole world longs for.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my national capacity as the representative of Kazakhstan.

We thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his customary detailed and objective update on the situation in the Middle East. I will focus on some salient developments in the Middle East and North Africa.

With regard to Syria, Kazakhstan continues to support the measures taken by United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, as well as by the Russian Federation, Turkey, Iran, the United States and the international community, to bring the Government of Syria and the Syrian opposition together. On 22 December, the eighth international meeting on Syria in Astana concluded with the adoption of a number of documents promoting confidence-building measures and aimed at combating terrorism and consolidating the political process in Syria. The meeting also adopted a joint statement by the Astana process guarantor States, Iran, Russia and Turkey, which decided to appoint a working group on the release of detainees/abductees, the handover of bodies and the identification of missing persons, in addition to a joint statement on humanitarian mine action in Syria that included UNESCO's list of cultural heritage sites. Kazakhstan intends to cooperate closely with the Syrian national dialogue congress to be held in Sochi on 29 and

30 January, involving representatives of all segments of Syrian society. The next high-level international meeting on Syria in Astana will be held next month in support of the Geneva process.

In Lebanon, the formation of a new Government and election of a new President are positive outcomes, and should lead to the holding of free and fair parliamentary elections on 6 May. The signing of a decree in that regard reflects the people's unity on the issue. It will be important to help Lebanon consolidate its constitution and democracy, which remain contingent on developments in neighbouring Syria. The Lebanese Armed Forces play a vital role in maintaining security on the border with Syria and throughout Lebanon, and thereby helping to prevent threats from Al-Nusra and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

We support the decision of the Iraqi Government to hold national and provincial council elections on 12 May, which will help its democracy and State-building processes and its consolidation of the Constitution. We also believe that reducing violence, especially in the liberated territories, will be very important politically. Kazakhstan welcomes the inter-Iraqi agreements to extend the ceasefire regime, which should remain in force until there is agreement on the joint management of the disputed territories. Kazakhstan is in favour of preserving the territorial integrity of Iraq as a State through a constructive dialogue between the Government and Iraqi Kurdistan. We suggest more meetings between the Prime Minister of Iraqi Kurdistan, Mr. Barzani, and his Iraqi counterpart in Baghdad, Mr. Al Abadi, such as that held on 20 January.

In Libya, we are told that fighting broke out recently in the Tajoura district of Tripoli. Kazakhstan calls on all parties to implement their obligations under international humanitarian law, safeguard civilians and civilian structures and focus on structural political issues among the many armed actors on the ground with conflicting agendas. Security sector reform is essential to the political process. The fragile and shaky status quo is not sustainable. It is therefore necessary to amend the Libyan Political Agreement to achieve a stable Government.

Turning to Yemen, we know that that conflict has no military solution. It is clear that the deep-seated contradictions in Yemen can be resolved only through a broad-based and inclusive national dialogue. In addition, the coalition must agree to keep all ports open in Yemen in order to facilitate the rapid entry and distribution of humanitarian assistance and commercial imports across the country. We pay special tribute to the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Yemen, Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, for his determined support to work for peace in the country.

Kazakhstan's position on the Middle East peace process is very clear and remains unchanged. We support the two-State solution and call for the early resumption of negotiations, especially in the bilateral format and without preconditions. That should be in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, the relevant Security Council resolutions and other mechanisms and initiatives. We support the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the establishment of a free, sovereign and independent State within the international borders of 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. It is necessary to begin direct talks to reach agreement on pending issues by giving them the so-called final status through the signing of a basic treaty. We join the call of others to fully support the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which must continue without any financial cutbacks.

We endorse the words of Ambassador Nikki Haley that we need leaders with political will, great vision, conviction and a commitment to peace, such as Anwar Sadat and King Al Hussein of Jordan. To that list I would like to add President Yitzhak Rabin. They stood courageously for the ideals of peace and were unshaken in what they believed. One cannot build peace unilaterally. It requires two sides to meet each other in the aspiration for peace. Only last week, in this very Chamber, my President held a briefing on confidence-building measures (see S/PV. 8160) and expressed our country's firm belief in trust and confidence as the way to resolve issues of peace and security. We therefore call on the leaders of Palestine and Israel to come to the negotiating table and to promote confidence-building measures that will bring their people together to peace and security.

Finally, we reiterate the importance of reducing violence and preventing the emergence of new tensions in the Middle East in order to maintain global stability worldwide.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I wish to inform all concerned that we will be carrying on this open debate right through the lunch hour, as we have a large number of speakers.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Maldives.

Mr. Asim (Maldives): I wish to thank Kazakhstan in its capacity as President of the Security Council for convening today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East. This is my first time, since assuming office in 2016, to address the Council, and it is only right that it would be on an issue to which the Government and the people of Maldives have historically attached particular importance — the Middle East and the question of Palestine.

We started the year 2017 with hope for the people of Palestine. The adoption of resolution 2334 (2016), which was the first Security Council resolution on the Palestinian issue in almost a decade, was the most recent of many resolutions to reaffirm the illegality of Israeli occupation and settlements in Palestine. The resolution calls on States to distinguish in their relevant dealings between the territory of the State of Israel and the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. It was a step forward in the Security Council, demonstrating international support for addressing the predicament of the Palestinian people.

Yet the year ended with decisions that shook the foundations of that critical work. The Security Council long ago declared null and void, through resolutions 476 (1980) and 478 (1980), the Israeli occupation of the State of Palestine, the annexation of the Holy City of Jerusalem, the moving of the Israeli capital to Jerusalem and the decision by any country to recognize Jerusalem as its capital or to move its embassy to the holy land. Yet we seem not to be able to reach consensus in the Council on a matter previously agreed to, which enjoys nearly universal support. That is an unfortunate situation for the Council's effectiveness and legitimacy.

The Maldives has always believed that an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, established on the basis of the 1967 borders, living side by side in peace and harmony with Israel, is the best and only solution to the seven-decade conflict. It is unacceptable that the occupation of Palestinian lands continues in the twenty-first century. We call on Israel to fully implement the decisions of the Council and to respect the legal obligations under the Charter of the United Nations. We urge the Security Council to do more to address the continuing situation and to bring lasting peace to the people of Palestine.

We are encouraged that the Secretary-General has identified the seven-year-long situation in Syria as one of his priority areas for 2018. Since the start of the conflict, hundreds and thousands of people have been killed or driven out of their homes. Homes, livelihoods, hospitals, schools and basic infrastructure have been reduced to rubble. Fear and uncertainty have manifested themselves in the hearts of the Syrian people. While we recognize the progress being made in finding an end to the conflict, with the congress of all Syrian parties expected to be convened at the end of this month, much more remains to be done. Those small seeds of hope that we planted last year must grow tall and healthy.

Hope must also be cultivated in the hearts of our brothers and sisters in Yemen, who are suffering the worst famine in years, and in Libya, where violence still prevails. Peace is a prerequisite and a consequence of development, and we must do our part in finding constructive and lasting solutions in those countries.

The threat of terrorism and violent extremism continues to grow. Terrorists do not pay heed to borders. They do not distinguish between the young and the old or between women and men and do not respect any religion or culture. We can beat them only by being better and smarter and by countering violence with hope, misinformation with truth and ignorance with enlightenment. That is why we need to pay much more attention to the enabling factors, while cooperating across borders and sharing information and strategies on how to address the root causes in a meaningful and sustainable way.

We need to work together with the countries concerned and the people affected to find meaningful solutions to the many situations of violence and instability in the Middle East. At the same time, we need to focus on sustaining peace and maintaining stability and security so that conflict does not erupt again.

We believe that a key approach would be to focus on State-building in our peacekeeping and peacebuilding

efforts. State failure has the potential to derail any peace process. If we take stock of the variety of conflicts before us, it is clear that there is a clear need for the strengthening of State institutions to address conflict and to sustain peace — whether by strengthening the capacity of State institutions themselves to ensure meaningful checks and balances, by eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable development or by addressing other determinants of conflict, such as the dearth of resources or exposure to natural or man-made risks. In order to do so, the Security Council, in considering approaches to conflict resolution, ought to look at the wide plethora of tools available across the United Nations system, and not just military options. That would enable not only a more holistic approach to conflict resolution, but also a more lasting one. It would also, in many cases, ensure a more organized approach rather than a top-down one.

The Security Council always has our support in crafting lasting solutions to the many conflicts that face our world, especially in Palestine and the Middle East — a region with which we share many cultural, religious and historic ties. The Maldives will remain a partner to be counted on as we find shared solutions for our shared destiny.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Ms. Mudallali (Lebanon): It is a great honour for me to address the Security Council for the first time as the Permanent Representative of Lebanon. Please allow me to begin, Mr. President, by commending the excellent work of your presidency this month. Kazakhstan's efforts to promote dialogue and the peaceful resolution of conflicts has been exemplary. I would also like to congratulate the new non-permanent members of the Security Council and wish them the best of luck in their endeavour. Our deep appreciation also goes to the Permanent Mission of Japan for its presidency of the Council last month. Finally, I would also like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for his briefing.

Peace in the Middle East seems more remote than ever. The gaps between the parties are vast and growing, and the Arabs and Palestinians feel that the core principles of peace are being abandoned. Jerusalem remains the most sensitive of the long-established final status issues. Yet Israel's claim of exclusive control of Jerusalem and the United States recognition of Jerusalem as its capital have virtually foreclosed the peace process for the Arabs. That buries the hope for any just, comprehensive and lasting peace. It is making our people despair, and desperate people do desperate things.

I would like to add my voice to that of the representatives who spoke about the importance of funding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Lebanon hosts hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees, and leaving them without education means leaving them without a future.

Lebanon, which paid the heaviest price for the lack of peace during multiple Israeli invasions, understands the gravity of the situation when all the roads to peace are blocked. Lebanon has always supported a peace based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the two-State solution and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 in Beirut. A failure by the international community and this organ — which represents the will of this community — to reaffirm the core principles of peace could plunge our region into more conflict, with dire global implications.

In Lebanon, especially in the south, people are subjected daily to Israeli violations of our airspace and our maritime and territorial integrity, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006). Last week, we received Israel's unilateral stated intention to build a wall, not only along the Blue Line but in sensitive occupied areas. That will once again threaten to destabilize the situation in the south and could lead to conflict. Those provocative actions systematically reflect Israel's total disregard of its obligations under resolution 1701 (2006).

If Israel is interested in maintaining stability and security, there is an easy way — withdraw from the occupied Lebanese territory, put an end to persistent violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and remove the source of tension. We urge the United Nations and the Council to prevent further Israeli provocations. The last thing the Middle East needs now is miscalculation that might lead to conflict. My Government has reaffirmed its steadfast commitment to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) in its entirety and remains resolved to work with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and through the Tripartite Mechanism to expedite the delineation of the Blue Line, especially in sensitive areas.

The Lebanese Government requested the good offices of the Secretary-General in 2016 and has encouraged those efforts ever since. We appreciate the work of his Special Coordinator to resolve the issue of delineating the maritime border between Lebanon and Israel and their exclusive economic zones, in accordance with the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. The non-resolution of those issues will remain a source of conflict and will threaten peace and security.

Despite the economic, social and security challenges facing the country, the heavy burden of hosting over 1 million Syrian refugees and the conflict in Syria, Lebanese leaders are committed to holding parliamentary elections in May 2018. They are also fully engaged with the international community to consolidate Lebanon's stability through three conferences: the Rome II conference, to reinforce the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces, the cornerstone of Lebanon's stability and the spearhead in the fight against terrorism; the Conférence du Cèdre, to be held in Paris under France's leadership, in order to uphold and revitalize the Lebanese economy; and, lastly, the Brussels conference to help Lebanon cope with the refugee crisis. Those efforts are essential to protecting and preserving Lebanon as a model of coexistence in the region and preserving its stability.

We are not bound to a vicious circle of wars and violence in the Middle East. With the invaluable assistance of the Council, our region can transcend the dark reality of conflict and finally realize the long-awaited peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Liechtenstein.

Mr. Wenaweser (Liechtenstein): I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to discuss the situation of the Middle East in an open format. Developments in different parts of the region make it imperative that the broader membership can express itself on the action needed from the Security Council in order to meet the responsibilities it discharges on behalf of the entire membership.

The repeated failure of the Council to act on the most serious crimes in Syria appears in particularly sharp light as attacks with chemical weapons continue unabated, in blatant disregard of the most fundamental rules of international law and with horrific consequences for the Syrian people. We deplored the discontinuation of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), whose investigative capacity and preventive dimension continue to be urgently needed.

At the same time, we underline that accountability must, and can, be provided through other means, in particular through the Syria accountability mechanism — the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 — whose mandate clearly encompasses the use of chemical weapons by any perpetrator. We call on all States to fully cooperate with the Independent Mechanism by sharing relevant information and evidence and by providing it with the political and financial support necessary for it to implement its mandate. In that regard, Liechtenstein supports the French initiative to forge a partnership to ensure accountability for the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We welcome in particular the specific commitments by the partnership countries to support the work of the Mechanism.

The Security Council has a crucial responsibility to protect civilians from the most serious crimes under international law, including the deliberate targeting of civilian populations and infrastructure and preventing the delivery of urgently needed humanitarian aid. The humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen, evolving under the watch of the Council, has reached unprecedented dimensions, with more than 20 million people in need of assistance. The United Nations system and humanitarian actors on the ground, in particular the authoritative voice of the International Committee of the Red Cross, continue to sound the alarm about the suffering of the Yemeni people and to remind us of the preventable nature of this single largest humanitarian crisis.

We call on the Council — and in particular its nine members that have signed the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group Code of Conduct on mass atrocity crimes and that together constitute a procedural majority in the Council — to address the situation in Yemen with the attention and the urgency it deserves.

Liechtenstein shares the concern expressed by many that an already fragile peace process in the Middle East has been further jeopardized by recent developments and that a two-State solution — as the only promising

avenue to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace — is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve. We express our continued support for a two-State solution and the international legal framework in which such a solution can be achieved, including applicable international humanitarian law and the relevant resolutions of the Council — in particular resolutions 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016), which continue to be binding on all of us. We support the call of the General Assembly for an intensification and acceleration of efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. The Council remains a key actor in ensuring that any such efforts will be guided by applicable international law.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mrs. Rodríguez Camejo (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome this open debate of the Security Council and align ourselves with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Once again, we express our deep concern over the situation in the region of the Middle East, in particular the lack of tangible progress towards a just, peaceful, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

We reiterate our deepest concern over and rejection of the unilateral declaration made by the President of the United States, recognizing the city of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, which constitutes a serious and flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. The intention to modify the historic status of Jerusalem violates the legitimate interests of the Palestinian people and the Arab and Islamic nations. It will have serious consequences for stability and security in the Middle East, further increase tensions in the region and undermine any effort aimed at resuming peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians.

The Security Council must uphold the responsibility entrusted to it by the Charter of the United Nations for the maintenance of international peace and security, take the necessary decisions, and demand an immediate end to Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory, aggressive policies and settlement practices, and require compliance with the resolutions adopted by this organ on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. It should also immediately put an end to the nearly decade-long blockade of the Gaza Strip, where more than 2 million Palestinian civilians are immersed in a deep socioeconomic and humanitarian crisis.

Cuba will continue to support a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that is based on a two-State solution and allows the Palestinians to enjoy their right to self-determination and a free, independent and sovereign State, with its capital in East Jerusalem and within the pre-1967 borders, as well as the right of refugees to return. We will also continue to support the entry of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations.

With regard to the Syrian Golan, Cuba demands an end to the Israeli occupation and reiterates that any measure or action that has been or is being taken to change the legal, physical and demographic status and the institutional structure of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as Israel's measures to exercise its jurisdiction and administration in that territory, constitute violations of international law, international agreements, the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations, including Security Council resolution 497 (1981), and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Cuba advocates maintaining constructive and respectful dialogue among the peoples of the region, and calls for respect for sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of States.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): Let me begin by thanking the Kazakh presidency for convening this open debate.

As we mark a new year, the global peace and security landscape remains plagued by mounting and complex challenges; conflicts have intensified and new dangers have emerged. In fundamental ways, the world has gone into reverse. Nowhere is this fraught and volatile situation more apparent than in the Middle East. The two-State solution is in peril. The plight of the Palestinian people is being betrayed at the altar of narrow and myopic political interests and the quest for peace and stability in the region is becoming more elusive than ever.

This morning, we have witnessed an unfortunate but glaring flight from reality, with some speakers trying to deflect attention away from the tragedy of

the Palestinian people. We know why, and such actions are unsurprising. Occupiers have no case to make other than to create and present alternative facts.

The recent decision of certain countries to relocate their embassies to Jerusalem has further inflamed the situation. That decision has been justified as an expression of their sovereign right. That is a false determination. The legal status of Jerusalem is unambiguous. Several Security Council and General Assembly resolutions affirm that all legislative and administrative measures taken by the occupying Power to alter the character and status of Jerusalem are null and void. In fact, resolution 478 (1980) calls on States that have established their diplomatic missions in Jerusalem to withdraw them from the Holy City. Any action to the contrary is therefore not only a manifest violation of that resolution, but also a blatant attempt to legitimize Israel's illegal occupation of East Jerusalem.

When principles are trumped by self-serving interests, rationality and reason are invariably supplanted by threat and intimidation. We have witnessed that unfortunate spectacle with disturbing frequency in recent days, including at the United Nations. Yet, despite those provocations, members of the international community have stood firm and unfazed in their support for the Palestinian people. My country, Pakistan, will continue to support the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians and of people living under foreign occupation elsewhere, for example in Kashmir.

The Middle East can seek the dividend of peace only if it is built on the foundation of justice — an imperative that entails a viable, independent and contiguous State of Palestine on the basis of internationally agreed parameters and the pre-1967 borders and with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Pakistan is also deeply concerned over the continued financial constraints faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The unfortunate situation has been aggravated by the unilateral decision of a major donor to withhold more than half of its funding to the agency. The international community must not fail the Palestinian refugees. We must act now to ensure sufficient, predictable and sustainable financing for UNRWA in order for it to continue its activities, which are indeed a lifeline for Palestinian refugees.

As we all know, peace in the Middle East is essential to global peace and security. Yet, the region continues to be caught in a vortex of conflict, turmoil and intense rivalry among regional Powers. The cumulative consequence of that is plunging the Middle East into chaos and further disorder. In Yemen, a surge in diplomacy is essential to kick-start an inclusive political process. The prompt replacement of the outgoing Special Representative will be critical. That must be complemented by a massive humanitarian surge to address the suffering of the people of Yemen, including women and children. In Syria, the continued engagement of all sides in genuine, representative and direct intra-Syrian negotiations is the only way forward towards finding a political settlement of the conflict. We hope that the latest round of talks, which started in Vienna today, will produce concrete results.

In conclusion, allow me to say that this organ must live up to its responsibilities and ensure the implementation of its own resolutions on Palestine and other long-standing disputes, such as Kashmir, so that the people of the world do not lose entire faith in the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): As this is the first appearance of my delegation in the Security Council this year, allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate the delegation of Kazakhstan on assuming the presidency this month and the Council on this open debate on the situation in the Middle East. I would also like to welcome the new members of the Security Council, my brothers from Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Kuwait, Peru, Poland and the Netherlands.

My delegation would also like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his comprehensive briefing.

Since the last quarterly open debate (see S/PV.8072) of this organ, recent developments in certain parts of the Middle East have been worrying. Some countries are still going through war and conflict and hotspot issues remain complicated and intertwined, with ramifications on one another, which poses serious challenges to international peace and security. We hope to see peace in Syria and Yemen for the benefit of all the citizens of the region.

Development and prosperity and peace and security are much needed for peoples who have experienced conflict for far too long. We hope that maintaining full commitment to a peaceful political process will help to continue the secure and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons. We also highlight the efforts made to bring about stability, promote trust among the parties involved and, most importantly, improve the humanitarian situation in the conflict zone.

Nonetheless, in spite of disturbing recent developments in the Middle East, the international community must remain committed to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which has been successful and constitutes a positive factor in regional security. Its continued implementation will be of crucial importance.

On the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Da'esh threat in the region, my delegation believes that terrorists continue to evolve in their methods, organizational ability and networks. That is why Indonesia believes that no single country can deal with this issue by itself, and that there must be international cooperation.

Turning to the core issue of the Middle East, tension in the region has been heightened by the recognition by the United States of America of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The subject and significance of Jerusalem are widely recognized among the international community as sensitive and of central importance. That is certainly the case in the Council and for Palestinians and Indonesia. The legally binding status of Security Council resolutions on Jerusalem under the Charter of the United Nations is unquestionable. Indeed, in resolution 2334 (2016), adopted just over one year ago, the Council expresses grave concern about continuing Israeli settlement activities in Jerusalem, warning that they jeopardize the viability of the two-State solution.

For many years, members of the international community have noted that the growing intensity of occupation-related activities, such as separation wall, the blockade of Gaza, the violence of the Israel Defense Forces and new settlements, indicate that Israel is striving for a one-State solution while completely disregarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. As a result, an act of recognition of Israel's ownership of Jerusalem is de facto support for the illegal activities and violations being committed by that country, and encourages further similar action.

In the search for peace in the Middle East, the recognition of the special place of Jerusalem in the peace process has governed the approach of nations for several decades. As a result, Indonesia expects all countries to respect the status of Jerusalem and avoid pronouncements and actions that are capable of stimulating tensions within the region and in many other parts of the world, including Indonesia. We again urge States not to take provocative actions or to make pronouncements contrary to the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions regarding Jerusalem, as they create more problems than they resolve.

To that end, my delegation expresses its regret about the failure of the Council last month (see S/PV.8139) to adopt draft resolution S/2017/1060. Indonesia appreciates the efforts of the 14 members of the Council that supported the draft resolution, thereby demonstrating their commitment to seeking a solution. The votes of those 14 members and General Assembly resolution 72/160, which followed, clearly showed the international consensus on the status of the holy city and their rejection of the decision. My delegation takes this opportunity to once again express its appreciation to those Member States that still uphold and respect the inviolability of Security Council resolutions and international law.

As Indonesia has emphasized on many occasions in previous open debates, Palestine is the litmus test for the Council. Failure to respond in this case would put the Council's credibility in grave danger and jeopardize the trust of the general membership of the Organization. If we undermine or permit the undermining of resolutions on Palestine, what stance will the Council and Members of the United Nations take should there be similar violations?

In our view, it is also distressing that this latest disruption to the status quo occurred soon after the internal reconciliation reached by the Palestinians. If we want to see peace in Palestine, reconciliation is and has always been a crucial factor, and should be taken advantage of. This provocative action is therefore condemnable, as it may jeopardize internal reconciliation. We must be careful that, along with the situation in Gaza, such action is not exploited by extremists to spread their false ideologies. We are also concerned about the cutting of financing to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which is of utmost

importance and among the most successful programmes of the Organization.

Finally, my delegation reiterates its call for the intensification of international and regional efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace that is based on United Nations resolutions, the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, so as to end the Israeli occupation that has persisted since 1967. We thank the State of Palestine for its good faith in dealing with the situation, as it truly demonstrates that Palestine is a peace-loving State despite being faced with the difficult situation of defending its land and, of course, its dignity.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Vale de Almeida (European Union): I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 28 member States. The following countries align themselves with this statement: the candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania and the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As regards the Middle East peace process, allow me to start by informing the Security Council that the European Council, which brings together the Heads of States and Governments of our 28 member States, adopted short conclusions in mid-December, reiterating our firm commitment to the two-State solution and, in that context, that the EU position on Jerusalem remains unchanged. The aspirations of both parties for Jerusalem must be fulfilled, and a way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of both States.

In addition, the European Union and its member States will continue to respect the international consensus on Jerusalem that is embodied in, inter alia, resolution 478 (1980), including on the location of their diplomatic representations, until the final status of Jerusalem is resolved. Recognizing the special significance of the holy sites of Jerusalem to the three monotheistic religions, the European Union also strongly believes that the status quo put in place in 1967 for the Temple Mount/Al-Haram Al-Sharif must be upheld in line with previous understandings and with respect to Jordan's special role.

The European Union is stepping up its efforts to provide a political horizon for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In December, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, Ms. Mogherini, and European Union Foreign Ministers met in Brussels with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, while this week they met in the same formatwith the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. On both occasions, we conveyed our clear and united position. A negotiated two-State solution that fulfils the aspirations of both sides, in line with relevant Security Council resolutions and known parameters, is the only way to bring about the lasting peace and security that both Israelis and Palestinians deserve.

We want to contribute to rekindling hope and resuming the constructive engagement of all and with all towards a genuine peace process, because we believe that confrontation and lack of hope will only increase despair, strengthen radical forces and weaken forces of moderation and wisdom.

The European Union's position on Israeli settlement construction and related activities, including recent evictions in East Jerusalem and plans that have led to the forced transfer of Bedouin communities in the West Bank, is clear and has not changed. The European Union remains strongly opposed to Israel's settlement policy, which is illegal under international law. As reaffirmed by resolution 2334 (2016), that policy also dangerously threatens the viability of the two-State solution.

We also urge Palestinians to effectively continue to combat violence and incitement and to intensify efforts to reunite the West Bank and Gaza under one single and legitimate Palestinian Authority, which is also critical to improving the situation of the people in Gaza and will pave the way towards Palestinian elections. Furthermore, we urge both parties to stand by the Oslo Accords.

With all of that in mind, the European Union has agreed, with Norway, to hold an extraordinary meeting at the ministerial level of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians, in Brussels next week, on 31 January. That will be an opportunity to bring both parties and other relevant actors together to discuss measures that can underpin efforts to achieve a negotiated two-State solution and how to concretely support the Palestinian

State and institution-building, including financial support. The meeting will also address the situation in Gaza and efforts to assist reconciliation in order for the Palestinian Authority to reinstate full control in Gaza.

We are deeply concerned over the recent significant reductions of funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Reduced support will have serious security and humanitarian consequences not only in the West Bank and Gaza, but also in neighbouring countries. We wish to stress that the EU has provided extensive and reliable support to UNRWA since 1971. Collectively, the EU and its member States are among the largest contributors to the Agency, and that will continue. The EU is ready to use its good offices also vis-à-vis other current or potential future donors, to ensure that UNRWA remains able to carry out its important function of securing the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian refugees in an already unstable region.

Allow me to end by reaffirming the need for an appropriate and effective international and regional framework for relaunching direct negotiations. We will continue to engage with both parties and our regional and international partners, including within the Middle East Quartet, to promote a return to a meaningful process towards a negotiated two-State solution, in line with known parameters, and towards a peace that can be just and sustained.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Ms. Bahous (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for your able presidency of the Security Council this month, as well as the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladinov, for his briefing this morning. I would also like to welcome the new members of the Security Council: Kuwait, the Netherlands, Poland, Equatorial Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire to which I wish every success.

This meeting coincides with regional and international developments of paramount importance regarding the Middle East. The region is still suffering from crises and tensions. This year began with a situation that has resulted in the international community having to make difficult choices and face challenges that require all States to uphold international legitimacy, especially the resolutions of the Security Council. Jordan attaches great importance to these meetings, as we play a regional and international leading role in seeking peaceful and lasting solutions to regional crises, and are making efforts to create conditions conducive to finding those solutions.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is still the main source of instability in the region. We have repeatedly stressed that the Palestinian question is the key to peace and stability in the Middle East. Failure to achieve a comprehensive and just settlement on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative and resolutions of international legitimacy will significantly contribute to tensions and the continuation of violence in the region. We stress that the implementation of Security Council resolutions is the only way to address the challenges in the region and create the conditions necessary for achieving balance in the region.

Jerusalem, the home of Muslim and Christian holy sites, is at the heart of the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The international community considers the situation in Jerusalem as one of the final status issues which must be addressed through negotiations, based on resolutions of international legitimacy. It reaffirmed that these constants cannot be changed through unilateral decisions. Jordan has repeatedly stressed that we cannot accept any decisions regarding Jerusalem that fall outside of a comprehensive settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In that context, members of the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the United Nations have stated clearly that we must address the United States decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and relocate its Embassy to Jerusalem. Jordan will maintain its engagement with the international community to confront and reject any attempt to change the legal and historic status of Jerusalem, and rejects any imposition of fait accompli. His Majesty King Abdullah II, who is the Custodian of Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, has stressed that Jerusalem must be the holy city of peace for the followers of the three heavenly religions. It is unacceptable to change the legal status of Jerusalem and such attempts stoke the emotions of Muslims and Christians alike.

Jordan stresses the importance of cooperation as a tool in finding new political prospects to confront all the challenges that we are witnessing in the region. The achievement of a two-State solution and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on

the basis of 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, represent the only way to restore security and stability to the region. Jordan emphasizes that comprehensive and just peace is the Arab strategic choice based on the Arab Peace Initiative, which was adopted by all Arab States, supported by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and confirmed at the latest Summit of the League of Arab States, in March 2017. The Initiative addresses all final status issues, including the issue of Palestinian refugees.

In that regard, we stress the importance of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in providing basic health, rescue and education services to millions of Palestinian refugees. Such services are closely connected to stability and security in the region. We call on the international community to urgently increase its support to UNRWA in order to provide it with adequate, sustained and predictable funding.

On the crisis in Syria, the priority remains finding a political settlement in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and efforts undertaken in Geneva to achieve unity, stability and security in Syria. Jordan underscores its support for the Geneva operation under the auspices of the United Nations, and hopes that the current ninth round of talks in Vienna will lead to tangible results towards achieving peace and stability in Syria so as to create conditions that support the political track. We stress the importance of taking measures to build confidence among the Syrian parties, and the need to decrease tensions and violence and maintain all achievements within a framework of de-escalation. We support the efforts made by international humanitarian agencies in Syria to ensure the provision of humanitarian aid throughout the country in a quick and secure manner, and we welcome the resolution which extends for one year the cross-border humanitarian assistance.

We have made great strides in weakening terrorist groups in the region. However, concerted efforts, joined cooperation and coordination are still needed to overcome the challenge posed by terrorists, both at the regional and international levels. We stress the importance of sustaining the efforts to roll back those organizations of misguided terrorists. Finding diplomatic, peaceful and just solutions to the crisis in the region is the only way to overcome the despair we are witnessing. Through that avenue, we will be able to ahieve development and prosperity and bring about a better future for all the peoples of the region, especially the young people who aspire to live in an environment free of conflicts and crises, an environment that provides them with a better life.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Archbishop Auza: The Holy See congratulates you, Mr. President, on Kazakhstan's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month, and for convening this open debate to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

The Holy See deplores the untold sufferings of millions in the Middle East because of armed conflicts in various parts of the region, fuelled by old and new geopolitical rivalries of countries in and outside the Middle East. The Holy See believes that to restore peace to the region, it is urgent that the Council apply solutions envisioned by the Charter of the United Nations to put an end to the humanitarian crises that continue to ravage ancient peoples, religions and cultures in the Middle East.

The Palestinian-Israeli peace process lies at the centre of the maelstrom sweeping the Middle East and is one of the longest-standing conflicts on this Council's agenda. The Holy See reiterates the urgent need to resume negotiations between the parties on the central issues of the conflict, on the basis of all relevant Security Council resolutions. Pope Francis wrote on 18 January to the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar to affirm that the Holy See, for its part, will not cease to call urgently for a resumption of dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians for a negotiated solution, aimed at the peaceful coexistence of two States within the borders agreed between them and internationally recognized, with full respect for the special nature of Jerusalem, whose meaning goes beyond any consideration of territorial issues.

There can be no doubt that the Holy City of Jerusalem has a very special place not only in the hearts of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but also for worshippers of the three monotheistic Abrahamic religions everywhere. For that reason, during the 37th plenary meeting of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, held on 21 December 2017, the Holy See recalled the obligation of all nations to respect the historical status quo of the Holy City, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, and reiterated that only an internationally guaranteed status

can preserve its unique character and be an assurance of dialogue and reconciliation for peace in the region.

Today's open debate represents a fresh opportunity and a renewed appeal for action to push forward the peace processes aimed at finding durable, comprehensive and equitable solutions to the conflicts in the Middle East, achieved through political negotiations with the goodwill and collaboration of all States, under the effective and impartial United Nations leadership.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Dehghani (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the beginning, I would like to convey my delegation's appreciation to Kazakhstan for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, at this critical juncture for Palestine and the Middle East.

I align myself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is the core and central aspect of all conflicts in the Middle East. The injustice has been ongoing for more than seven decades, exacerbated through the Israeli expansionist, aggressive and apartheid policies towards Palestinians and the region. Each time we meet here, there are new announcements of illegal settlements or annexation plans. That should not be surprising from a regime governed by a Prime Minister who admits that "There was not and will not be a better Government for settlement than our Government." The Israeli regime now works day and night to negate any right of Palestinian statehood and to entrench the occupation.

The latest case in hand is the provocative decision of the United States to recognize Al-Quds as the capital of the Israeli regime, which revealed the complicity of both regimes to deprive the Palestinians of their basic rights to establish an independent State of their own, with Al-Quds as its capital. The whole international community rejected that illegal and politically wrong decision in the General Assembly on 21 December 2017 and manifested its support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinians, despite all grotesque intimidations exercised before the vote.

The fast-growing illegal settlements in Palestinian territory constitute not only a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention, but also a war crime that is another clear indication that the Israeli regime has never had any interest in peace. Israel's entire history starts with the illegal occupation of Palestinian land and is full of aggression against its neighbours and other countries in the Middle East, at least 14 times since 1948.

That regime arrogantly and flagrantly continues to violate at least 86 resolutions adopted by this Council, from resolution 54 (1948) to resolution 2334 (2016), on illegal settlement activities. There are many more from the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and United Nations specialized agencies, all adopted in response to its illegal occupation, repeated acts of aggression and its well-documented atrocities, apartheid policies and war crimes against the Palestinian people. The Israeli regime, emboldened by the impunity provided to it by the United States, shamelessly and flagrantly continues to violate all Security Council resolutions on the Middle East, while shedding crocodile tears for those resolutions it chooses to like.

Israel continues to flout all international regimes governing weapons of mass destruction by refusing to adhere to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention. Surprisingly and shamelessly, that regime seeks sympathy by claiming that it, in fact, is the one under threat, and not the Palestinians. No political theatre can hide the fact that Israel's policies of incremental aggression and expansion and its behaviour towards its neighbours are the main source of the threat to peace and security in the region.

The destructive role of the United States in international conflicts, particularly in the Middle East, is incontestable. The United States has never been an honest partner for peace and justice in that conflict, and it never will be. It is a discredit to the Council when it fails to act with regard to genuine issues, such as the long-lasting occupation of Palestinian territory — to which this agenda item is dedicated — or to the indiscriminate bombing of Yemen over the past three years that has brought hunger, disease and destruction to the Yemeni people, as well the blockade preventing the delivery of humanitarian assistance, which has led to the largest famine the world has seen in many decades, as described by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. The list of such failures attributable to the obstructionist approach by the United States delegation goes on and on.

Although the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory certainly is the main contributor to the instability of the Middle East, there are other contributors. Every instance of foreign intervention, occupation and its ensuing instability, and attempts to engineer societies in the Middle East has proven to provide breeding grounds for terrorist and extremist groups. Unfortunately, the American and the Israeli regimes prefer to resort to, promote and spread Iranphobia, and that has become a kind of ongoing obsession and hysteria for them. We have heard them in today's open debate and over the past several months. That hysteria is actively perpetuated by those willing to sell or spend their dollars on beautiful American weapons. It has nothing to do with peace and security in the Middle East. On the contrary, it is an undeniable fact that, while Iran was helping the people of Iraq and Syria to defeat Da'esh, the United States and others were busy arming its members.

In conclusion, at a time when the Palestinian people are facing increasing Israeli aggression, Iran reaffirms its long-standing solidarity with the Palestinian people, while recognizing their decades of resilience despite much suffering and injustice, and reiterates its strong support for their legitimate and inalienable rights, including to self-determination and freedom in an independent and viable State of Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): The situation across the Middle East remains volatile. Through a long-term struggle for peace and stability in the region, we have learned that military solutions never provide a sustainable solution and that creating a political solution is the only way to bring about lasting peace and stability. Sadly, we continue to witness a surge of violence and hostile actions in the Middle East and North Africa.

During its two-year term as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, which ended in December 2017, Japan consistently stressed the importance of the peaceful resolution of conflicts based on the relevant Security Council resolutions and other international obligations. We continue to be committed to the maintenance of peace and security in the Middle East, and we intend to strengthen our political engagement to stabilize the region.

With regard to the Middle East peace process, His Excellency Mr. Taro Kono, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, visited Israel and Palestine in late December 2017. He had candid discussions with Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas, respectively. In both meetings, Minister Kono articulated Japan's unchanged position supporting a two-State solution and the premise that all issues, including the status of Jerusalem, should be resolved through negotiations among the concerned parties. Minister Kono also urged both parties to constructively engage in negotiations, and, in that context, he underscored that the role of the United States would continue to be important.

In parallel with those political dialogues, Japan continues its unique confidence-building measures. The Jericho Agro Industrial Park, with Palestine and Israel's participation, as well as Japan's, has entered a new phase, expanding its scope to cover the information and communication technology sector and the facilitation of its logistics. Japan will also continue its long-standing Youth Invitation Program from Israel and the Palestinian Territories, which is celebrating its twentieth anniversary this year. The spirit behind such confidence-building measures is that investment in people and enduring efforts will eventually bear fruit. Although it may seem a roundabout way to bringing about peace, we believe that those confidence-building measures contribute to creating an atmosphere conducive to meaningful negotiations.

Although we welcome the resumption of electricity supply to Gaza, the humanitarian situation there remains dire. Desperation and frustration felt on the ground can lead to the instability of the security situation. Japan is committed to supporting the improvement of the living conditions of the people of Gaza. At the same time, we will also continue supporting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which contributes to maintaining the stability of the wider region.

We are concerned about the heightened tension and frustration among parties. At this critical juncture, the international community must be united in upholding a two-State solution through negotiations based on the relevant Security Council resolutions and agreements previously reached by the parties. We expect that the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians meeting to be held at the end of this month will provide a good opportunity to that end. Japan, for its part, will continue its engagement through its three pillars of political dialogue with the parties, confidence-building in the region and economic assistance to the Palestinians.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations.

Mr. Abdelaziz (*spoke in Arabic*): Today's Security Council meeting is taking place against a very complex regional and international backdrop that poses a blatant challenge to the framework of multilateralism in international relations, and a radical change in the way critical issues are addressed in the United Nations. This includes the need for Member States, especially Security Council members, to respect their international commitments under international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law, as well as the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

At this major historic juncture, I confirm the full and absolute support of the League of Arab States for intensive international and regional efforts to achieve a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East that ensures a complete peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question in all its aspects through negotiations between Israel and Palestine. Those negotiations would address five final-status issues, foremost among which is the question of Jerusalem, pursuant to the key terms of reference of the peace process, including, inter alia, the Madrid principles and the principle of land for peace. This should take place in full compliance with the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet road map and the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016). Such resolutions provide a reference framework within which the United Nations can work to establish an independent Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, and 1967 borders. That would enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights, above all the right to self-determination, and to establish an independent and sovereign State.

Today's meeting takes place against the exceptional international backdrop of the United States' unilateral declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel, and the relocation of the American Embassy to Jerusalem. That move completely ignores all of the principles, terms of reference and international resolutions governing the Middle East peace process, in particular Security Council resolutions. We all know that Jerusalem is a highly sensitive issue for the three monotheistic religions. We know that in order to achieve a just and comprehensive peace, direct negotiations must take place between Israel and Palestine. It will not be achieved with unilateral resolutions adopted by the major sponsors of the peace process. Although countries choose the locations of their embassies, their choice should not contradict the resolutions of international legitimacy, including those of the Security Council. Such resolutions cannot be challenged simply because they were adopted several years ago by previous Governments or administrations. That includes resolution 2334 (2016) that underscores the text of resolution 478 (1980), which calls on

> "[t]hose States that have established diplomatic missions at Jerusalem to withdraw such missions from the Holy City" (*resolution 478 (1980), para. 5 (b)*).

At its emergency ministerial meeting in Cairo on 9 December 2017, the League of Arab States renewed its rejection of the American position on Jerusalem, announced on 6 December 2017. The move was supported by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in the resolution adopted at the Islamic Summit Conference held in Istanbul on 13 December 2017. It was also supported by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and other States and organizations in clear statements and resolutions that stressed the extreme damage it would cause to the peace process. The international consensus against the American decision was underscored when 14 members of the Security Council voted in favour of draft resolution S/2017/1060, which was put forward by Egypt on behalf of the Group of Arab States, and when the overwhelming majority of the members of the General Assembly voted in favour of resolution 72/240, with the exception of eight countries that voted against it.

For the first time in the history of the United Nations, the United States made several threats to use economic assistance as a means to exert pressure on developing countries in order to compel them to change their position. The League of Arab States thanks all countries that upheld international legitimacy, stood up to the threats and held on to the principles and values of the United Nations. We call on the United States to review its decision, fully implement Security Council resolutions on the Palestinian question, and respect final-status issues.

The Palestinian Authority should not be forced to accept solutions that do not benefit the Palestinian people, including threats with regard to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine

Refugees in the Near East and the Palestinian Authority. Furthermore, we share international concerns about the tensions and escalation in the Arab region, especially in the Palestinian occupied territories. We see the Israeli authorities supporting the position of the United States on Jerusalem in order to consolidate their occupation of East Jerusalem. We firmly condemn the provocative measures taken by the occupying Power, Israel. It has accelerated and increased its settlement-building activities in East Jerusalem, in line with decisions taken by the Knesset that are at variance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Security Council resolutions call on Israel to halt its settlement activities, in particular in the occupied Palestinian territories and East Jerusalem.

We reiterate that the ongoing occupation of Palestinian territories by Israel, including its illegal settlement-building activities, is a threat to international and regional peace and security. We therefore call on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility to protect international legitimacy, as well as its own resolutions, which are key components of international action towards lasting and just peace in the Middle East. We call on the Council to step up its efforts to reach a comprehensive outcome through direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine on the final status.

We call for the cessation of measures that could alter historic facts on the ground. At the same time, Israel must understand that if it wants to become a non-permanent member of the Security Council, it must show that it is working towards international peace and security, in accordance with Article 23 of the Charter of the United Nations. Israel must fully respect international law and demonstrate that it supports international peace and security. It must also end the occupation of Palestinian territories and enable the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. In order to allow the Palestinian people to enjoy their inalienable rights, Israel must stop flouting international legitimacy and breaching Security Council resolutions, in line with Article 25 of the Charter.

The League of Arab States will step up its cooperation with other international and regional stakeholders so as to end the occupation and create an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, through direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine on all final status issues to ensure that Israel and Palestine can coexist in peace, security and stability.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Moncada (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to speak on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries at today's quarterly debate on a subject to which we have always attached great importance — the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

First, let us thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his useful briefing.

In the light of the critical situation and diminishing prospects for peace, including as a result of recent provocative unilateral action taken with regard to Jerusalem, in violation of Security Council resolutions, and the adverse impact of such action, the Non-Aligned Movement takes this opportunity to reaffirm its abiding solidarity with the Palestinian people and its unwavering support for their just cause.

At this critical juncture, and recognizing the paramount importance of resuming negotiations to achieve a just and peaceful solution, in accordance with relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the Movement reaffirms its commitment to strengthening and coordinating international efforts to promote a just, peaceful and lasting solution to the Palestinian question, in all its aspects, including respect for justice and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including to self-determination and independence. At the same time, it urges all the parties and Member States involved to work to that end. This continues to be a priority within the Movement's agenda and is reaffirmed at the highest levels on an ongoing basis.

The Movement reaffirms that the ongoing Israeli occupation and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a whole continue to pose a serious threat to international peace and security. This urgently requires attention and a solution that is in keeping with international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and, of course, the Charter of the United Nations itself. Moreover, the Security Council must uphold its responsibilities under the Charter in this regard and act to ensure that its own

resolutions are upheld, as these are binding on all States Members of the United Nations and represent the basis of a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the conflict.

In this regard, the States members of the Movement remain ready to contribute to the achievement of such a solution, and we therefore call for intensified regional and international efforts in support of this objective. We also recall the responsibility of the Security Council and the General Assembly in this regard, including what was recently reaffirmed in resolution 2334 (2016), which was welcomed and supported strongly by the Movement. We believe that the resolution provides the most viable path to peace, as it sets forth the essential requirements and parameters for a just solution that would preserve the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, respecting the terms of reference of peace endorsed by the international community, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Madrid principles, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map.

Moreover, the Movement reiterates its call for full respect for and the implementation of all relevant resolutions in this regard, as this would create the conditions necessary to end the occupation, justly resolve the conflict in all its aspects and make Palestinian-Israeli peace and security a reality.

It is therefore imperative that action be taken immediately, in accordance with United Nations resolutions, to redress the situation on the ground, de-escalate tensions and foster an appropriate environment for the pursuit of peace. Provocations, unilateral actions and the escalation of tensions are completely incompatible with the pursuit of peace and can be neither rationalized nor accepted. Clearly, contempt for the Security Council and disregard for United Nations resolutions can only exacerbate the situation, with further grave consequences, which must be avoided.

Today the Non-Aligned Movement joins the overwhelming international consensus in expressing its grave concern regarding recent developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, in particular since the decision unilaterally announced by some Governments that they would transfer their embassies to Israel to the city of Jerusalem. In line with the communication issued by the Movement on 5 December 2017, we reject these and any other related actions aimed at consolidating Israel's control and the unlawful de facto annexation of the city.

In this regard, we recall and reaffirm the provisions of resolution 478 (1980), which expressly called on those States that have established diplomatic missions in Jerusalem to withdraw such missions from the holy city. We reaffirm that any attempts to alter the character, status or demographic composition of the city of Jerusalem, as set out in the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, have no legal effect and are null and void, and we also stress that Jerusalem is a final-status issue to be resolved through negotiations.

We further reaffirm all Security Council and General Assembly resolutions relating to Jerusalem and confirm that it is an integral part of occupied Palestinian territory. Unilateral actions of that sort, in flagrant disrespect of Security Council resolutions, aside from jeopardizing the possibility of achieving the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders, could seriously destabilize the fragile situation on the ground, with dangerous effects, as can currently be seen given that Israel, the occupying Power, has further intensified its illegal and inhuman policies in occupied Palestine, including in East Jerusalem. It has done so including through the enactment of laws aimed at further entrenching its 50-year foreign occupation and facilitating its illegal acquisition of territory by force through annexationist measures, which are prohibited by international law and by this very Council. Moreover, such actions could potentially have far-reaching repercussions for the future of the two-State solution to the conflict as prescribed by the Council. That is why they must be fully condemned and rejected.

The Movement strongly condemns the recent provocative decisions by Israel, the occupying Power, to proceed with its settlement activities, in grave breach of international law and in direct and deliberate violation of the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). We are alarmed by and deeply deplore such flagrant contempt by the occupying Power of the unequivocal determination by the Security Council on this issue, which clearly reaffirmed that Israel's settlement activities have no legal validity and constitute a clear violation under international law, and called on Israel to immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and fully respect

all of its legal obligations, including those under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Turning to Gaza, the situation remains one of great concern for the Movement, particularly the serious humanitarian situation. In this regard, the Movement reiterates its call for the total lifting of the 10-year-old Israeli blockade of Gaza, which continues to impose untold humanitarian, social and economic suffering on more than 2 million Palestinian children, women and men. The Movement stresses once again that the crisis in Gaza must be addressed comprehensively, in accordance with international law, including humanitarian and human rights law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, in the context of the overall situation and of the continued illegitimate, belligerent Israeli foreign occupation of Palestinian territory since 1967 and of the unequivocal calls for an end to this half-century of occupation.

In the light of the current situation on the ground, threats against the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) could result in nothing less than a humanitarian disaster in Gaza, with potential destabilizing consequences in host countries. The Movement, therefore, urges States to extend the needed support to UNRWA without delay, in line with humanitarian principles, the relevant resolutions and the abiding international responsibility vis-à-vis the Palestinian question, in order to ensure continued vital assistance to Palestinian refugees pending a just solution to their plight.

The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms that all measures and actions taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, such as its illegal decision of 14 December 1981, which purports to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan and its institutional structure, as well as the measures taken by Israel to apply its jurisdiction and administration there, are null and void and have no legal effect.

In this regard and in line with our principled position, we demand once again that Israel abide by the provisions of resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw immediately from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967, in accordance with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Moreover, the States members of the Movement emphasize the need for Israel to withdraw from all Lebanese territories, including the Sheba'a farms, the Kfar Shuba hills and the Lebanese part of occupied Al-Ghajar village up to the Blue line, in accordance with relevant international resolutions, in particular resolution 1701 (2006).

To conclude, while reiterating its call for the strengthening of international efforts aimed at achieving, without further delay, an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 and the long-overdue objective of a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution, the Movement reaffirms its long-standing support for, and solidarity with, that just cause and its strong commitment to continuing to support the heroic Palestinian people in their quest to achieve their inalienable rights and legitimate national aspirations, including their right to self-determination, freedom and independence in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital. That is vital for the establishment of a just, comprehensive and sustainable peace. Only a comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine will enable us to achieve the long-sought peace in the Middle East region and to finally resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Botswana.

Mr. Sisa (Botswana): At the outset, allow me join other representatives who spoke before me in congratulating your country, Mr. President — the Republic of Kazakhstan — on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. My delegation also wishes to commend you on convening this important open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, which has been on the agenda of the Security Council and the General Assembly for a long time. In that regard, Botswana welcomes the open debates held by the Security Council on a quarterly basis on this important topic. I also applaud the briefers for providing us with insightful and instructive briefings on the subject matter.

Botswana aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Botswana fully supports the various peace initiatives that have been undertaken by the United Nations, the Quartet for Middle East peace and the international community to find a comprehensive, just and durable solution to the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, on the basis

of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and the two-State solution.

We are encouraged by the positive developments with regard to the intra-Palestine talks, the implementation of the Cairo agreement and the return of Gaza to the control of the legitimate Palestinian Authority, including the handover of Gaza crossings in November 2017.

Despite those positive developments, Botswana is still deeply concerned that the question of Palestine has remained unresolved for many decades. We are also concerned about the escalation of violence and the continued documented settlement-related activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, which, regrettably, undermine all international efforts aimed at the achievement of a lasting solution.

Botswana reaffirms its support for the fundamental principle of self-determination for peoples still under colonial and foreign occupation and domination. In that respect, Botswana supports the Palestinian people in their legitimate quest for sovereignty and independent statehood.

We also firmly believe that there is no alternative to the two-State solution. Consequently, Botswana will continue to support a negotiated solution to the question of Palestine that embraces the peaceful coexistence of the State of Israel and the State of Palestine as two sovereign States living side by side.

Above all, Botswana recognizes the holy city of Jerusalem as a final-status issue in terms of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

In recognition of those points, Botswana urges the States Members of the United Nations to avoid taking any unilateral action that may prejudice peace in the Middle East and the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and the status of Jerusalem. In that light, Botswana regretted the decision by the United States of 6 December 2017 to recognize the city of Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel, contrary to strong international consensus that affirms that the status of Jerusalem should be determined through a negotiation process between the States of Israel and Palestine.

With regard to other areas of the Middle East, we welcome resolution 2394 (2017), renewing the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, which monitors the ceasefire between Israeli and Syrian forces in the Golan region, until 30 June. We encourage the parties to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement to abide by its terms and to observe the long-standing ceasefire.

In conclusion, we support the continued efforts of the Secretary-General, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, the Quartet, the Security Council, the General Assembly and the international community to find a comprehensive, just, durable and peaceful solution to the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. It is our hope that the situation in the Middle East will be resolved so that the people in that region can live in peace and harmony.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Davidson (South Africa): We congratulate you and your delegation, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January.

We align ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

It is hoped that the onset of the new year will renew the commitment of the Security Council to contributing towards a peaceful resolution of this long-standing agenda item. We cannot allow another year to pass without progress on the Middle East peace process, as every year that goes by makes peace appear even more elusive. New challenges, as we have seen recently with the developments pertaining to the status of Jerusalem, have compounded existing negative developments, such as the continuing Israeli illegal settlement activity. South Africa continues to believe that the best option for the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict is premised upon the following.

The first element is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and independence, which entails a principled position against the military occupation of the Palestinian people and their land. The second element is the right of the peoples both of Israel and of Palestine to live side by side in peace in their own States, based on the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine. The third factor is the belief that there can be no military solution to the conflict and that peaceful negotiation is the only means of ensuring lasting peace, security and stability. The fourth factor

is the commitment to multilateralism in order to secure a sustainable solution and a rules-based international order. No unilateral act by any party should pre-empt the final-status issues.

South Africa wishes to use today's debate as an opportunity to highlight an issue of particular concern to our delegation, that is, the plight of the children in military detention in Israel. Those children experience widespread systematic and institutionalized ill-treatment in military detention and are easily hidden from the public eye. Nevertheless, reflecting on data from UNICEF, we are concerned about the high rates of physical abuse, strip searches and the use of solitary confinement in the context of interrogations, as well as threats and verbal abuse. While the immediate injustice of those abuses cannot be overstated, it is the psychological and developmental harm to those young individuals that is most troubling. Furthermore, such abuses merely seek to reinforce hatred among the two sides to the conflict, prolonging the crisis and doing nothing to reconcile the parties.

South Africa is deeply concerned that unilateral action by some Member States to recognize Jerusalem as the capital city of Israel undermines the revival of a peace process. The relevant United Nations resolutions and mutual agreements on the status of Jerusalem should remain a central aspect of any negotiated solution, to be resolved by the parties. Furthermore, the city of Jerusalem remains a sacred space for all the major Abrahamic religions, which is one reason why it continues to be one of the most disputed aspects of the peace process. To prejudge the outcome is most likely to put the entire peace process, in particular the two-State solution, in jeopardy.

South Africa continues to call for more financial support for United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which provides assistance to, and protection for, more than 5 million Palestinian refugees. The continued strong and generous support of the international community is necessary to ensure the Agency's continuity of services, and is especially needed in the light of the recurrent and severe financial shortfalls that continue to affect its vital humanitarian programmes. We would like to emphasize that the funding for UNRWA should be sustainable, predictable and sufficient. For its part, South Africa will continue to support UNRWA through its financial contributions. Furthermore, we will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people through the India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum fund.

In conclusion, South Africa remains firmly convinced that continued dialogue in support of a peaceful solution is the only viable option that can effectively address the issue. To ensure that, the efforts of the international community need to move towards building trust among the parties and not lead to the entrenchment of divisions and long-standing hatred. We remain hopeful and urge both sides to resume the peace process for a comprehensive, just and lasting resolution of the Palestinian issue.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. It is a historic presidency by all measures, as proved by the personal presence of the President of Kazakhstan and his participation in the work of the Council. I would also like to congratulate the delegations of Kuwait, Equatorial Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Peru, Poland and the Netherlands on joining the Security Council. I wish them every success in this critical task.

We align ourselves with the statements delivered on behalf of the Group of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Jerusalem is the Flower of the Cities. It is the cradle of the three heavenly religions. It is, and should be, an oasis for peace, coexistence and love. It is the twin city of the two Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina. It was in Jerusalem that the Prophet undertook his famous Night Journey. For more than 1,400 years, Jerusalem has been an Arab and Muslim city, a city open to the world and to all religions and civilizations — a source of thought and spirituality.

Jerusalem is the eternal historical capital of Palestine. It has been and will always be like that. Despite the clouds, the sun will definitely rise again.

Jerusalem has been an item on the Council's agenda for the past 50 years, during which it has fallen prey to the Israeli occupation. The Council has adopted a number of resolutions, including, for example, resolutions 465 (1980), 476 (1980), 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016). All of those resolutions stress that all unilateral

decisions that aim to change the historical and legal status of Jerusalem and to impose a fait accompli are null and void. They will never establish a right and will never be binding, but rather will be a violation of all agreed conventions. Those adopted resolutions cannot be ignored, unilateral measures notwithstanding.

All international instruments since the 1993 Oslo Accords to date have recognized Jerusalem as one of the final status issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel has taken many measures against Jerusalem, including its decision to annex it to Israel, to control its fate and its future, to evict Palestinian citizens, to build settlements and to confiscate the properties of its people, to impose restrictions on its people, to declare it as the capital of Israel and to seek recognition of such a decision. All of those measures are null and void and have no basis in law, norms, customs and even ethics.

In 2002, my country launched the Arab Peace Initiative, which reflected Arab and Muslim readiness to make peace in accordance with international resolutions, by ending the Israeli occupation of all occupied Arab territories, with the Syrian Arab Golan and occupied Palestinian and Lebanese territories, including the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia would like to stress that any measure taken by the occupying Power on Jerusalem is null and void. Any recognition of Jerusalem as the capital and any relocation of the embassy of any country to Jerusalem are null and void. They will only fuel tension in the Middle East, undermine trust in the peace process and jeopardize any chances of reaching a comprehensive, lasting and just settlement based on the two-State solution, which would lead to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State along the borders of 4 June 1967, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Iran continues its flagrant interference in the internal affairs of Arab States, including Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and others. Iran continues to spread, support and sponsor terrorism. It is the main supporter of the terrorist group Hizbullah, which continues to control Lebanon, to fuel the war in Syria and to commit the worst forms of killing, siege and ethnic cleansing. Iran continues to support insurgency and coup masters, including the Houthi militias in Yemen, providing them with weapons, including rockets that are used to launch attacks against my own country. There have been nearly 90 rocket attacks against Saudi Arabia, as proved by a number of independent reports issued by the United Nations. Those reports have concluded that the rockets are of Iranian origin, in a flagrant violation of resolutions 2216 (2015) and 2231 (2015).

It is high time for the Security Council to take a firm position against Iran and to prove that the international community will not stand idly by and will not overlook those aggressive terrorist practices, which undermine international and regional peace and security. It is time to seriously address the problem of Hizbullah, and to expose its terrorist activities in Syria, Lebanon and other parts of the world, to stop its arming and its practices, which run counter to the Lebanese Constitution.

The Syrian crisis, now in its seventh year, is at a critical crossroads. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia underscores that the only solution is through a Syrian consensus that meets the aspirations of the people and end their suffering, based on the first Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has sought to unify the factions of the Syrian opposition and to encourage them to speak in one voice and to form one delegation. Saudi Arabia hosted the second Syrian opposition conference in Riyadh in November 2017, which helped bring the opposition together under unified leadership. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia emphasizes the need to deal with this leadership as it is considered representative of the Syrian people and tasked with negotiating with the ruling authorities in Syria. Humanitarian suffering continues in Syria. Ruling authorities in Syria, supported by their allies, including the Iranian military, the Hizbullah terrorist group and sectarian mercenaries, continue to destroy the Syrian people and use chemical weapons against them, as proved by independent United Nations reports.

We would like to remind those present that there are more than 3 million people currently stranded in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. Therefore, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia once again calls for immediate access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need across Syria, regardless of their racial, religious, sectarian or political affiliations. We call for the urgent release of detainees and kidnapped people, as well as for the determination of the whereabouts of the disappeared people. We further call for assuring the dignified return of internally displaced persons and refugees to their homes and places of choice.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Itegboje (Nigeria): My delegation wishes to congratulate you, Mr. President, and your country, Kazakhstan, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January and commend you, sir, for convening today's open debate, which affords us an opportunity to weigh in on recent developments in the Middle East. My appreciation also goes to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his insightful remarks.

Nigeria aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Nigeria notes with grave concern the alarming situation in many parts of the Middle East, particularly in Palestine. In that regard, it is pertinent for all parties to make genuine and concerted efforts to find peaceful solutions and cooperate closely with the United Nations and its agencies in order to achieve the shared objective of a two-State solution, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law.

As the international community continues to seek avenues to advance the peaceful resolution of the Palestinian question, efforts must remain focused on paving the way for Israel and Palestine to return to meaningful negotiations. We therefore highlight the cogency of multilateral diplomacy and reiterate that there is no substitute to an agreed multilateral approach in addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conundrum in a sustainable manner.

Nigeria believes that achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine is imperative for the attainment of durable peace and stability in the Middle East. It is for that reason that we acknowledge the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution ES-10/19, on the status of Jerusalem, on 21 December 2017, and once again, call on all parties to respect the relevant United Nations resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

It must be stated that recent developments must not obscure the underlying problem in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We encourage Israel to take concrete measures to freeze all settlement-related activities in the occupied Palestinian territory. On their part, Palestinian leaders must also signal their readiness to return to the negotiating table by, inter alia, making enhanced efforts to forge unity and deal with militancy and other internal security challenges. It is beyond doubt that violence and unilateral actions will not resolve the long drawn-out conflict.

In conclusion, Nigeria calls on all States with influence over the parties concerned to encourage them to re-engage in dialogue on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Quartet road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and other existing agreements. We reaffirm our unwavering support for a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine existing side-by-side in peace and tranquillity.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Estonia.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia): Estonia aligns itself fully with the statement made by the observer of the European Union.

We share the view that, despite all difficulties, we have to strive towards a just and comprehensive resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the two-State solution, with both States living side-by-side in peace, security and mutual recognition. There is no alternative to a negotiated two-State solution. The regional context, including the ongoing radicalization and spread of terrorism, makes it even more urgent to end the conflict. The status quo is not an option, as the viability of the two-State solution is constantly being eroded by emerging new facts on the ground. We urge both parties to demonstrate their stated commitment to the two-State solution through concrete actions.

At the same time, actions by either side that call into question their stated commitment must be avoided. We reaffirm our position that the status of Jerusalem has to be resolved through negotiations, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions. The international community should actively support the parties in the restoration of confidence and creation of an environment of trust, which is necessary to engage in meaningful negotiations, as soon as possible.

Today, it is crucial to stabilize the situation and reverse negative trends on the ground. We recall the 2016 Quartet report (S/2016/595, annex) recommendations, which called upon both sides to de-escalate tensions by exercising restraint and refraining from provocative actions, as well as rhetoric. In order to restore trust, the Palestinian side should act decisively to cease

incitement to violence and strengthen ongoing efforts to combat and condemn terrorism. Israel should cease the policy of illegal settlement construction and expansion, designating land for exclusive Israeli use and denying Palestinian development. Both sides should take all the necessary steps to prevent violence and protect the lives and property of all civilians.

Estonia is deeply concerned about the funding cuts to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which has been an essential lifeline for many Palestinians for decades, providing basic services, including food and support to children's education and health care. Humanitarian aid should not be politicized. Estonia has annually supported the work of UNRWA and will continue to do so. Estonia has also bilaterally supported the capacity-building of the Palestine administration by developing e-governance services.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. García Moritán (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for inviting me to participate in this open debate on a topic that the Security Council has been discussing for quite some time, although the importance of which has not diminished.

Argentina has historically maintained a position of principle in favour of resolving disputes through peaceful means, respect for international law, sovereignty, independence, national unity and territorial integrity of States, rejection of the acquisition of territories by the strength, confidence in the constructive role and the persuasive power of the international community to pave the way towards peaceful, just and definitive solutions.

Argentina decisively supports all efforts aimed at achieving peace and stability in the Middle East. The constructive role of all parties, including regional actors and major Powers, is decisive in moving towards a settlement of differences through negotiations. Argentina also calls for unilateral actions and provocations to be avoided, and we condemn all incitement to violence.

Argentina wishes to reaffirm its resolute support for a peaceful, definitive and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question based on the two-State solution, with the 1967 borders, as the parties determined in the negotiation process, and as established in the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Argentina reaffirms its support for the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and for an independent and viable State, recognized by all nations; as well as the right of the State of Israel to live in peace with its neighbours, within secure and internationally recognized borders.

Likewise, Argentina reiterates its concern about the persistent and continued growth of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and urges the cessation of their expansion, as established in Council resolution 2334 (2017) adopted on 23 December 2016. The international community as a whole has been very clear: the settlements are contrary to international law, hamper peace, weaken the prospect of two States living in peace and security, and thereby promote the perpetuation of an unsustainable status quo.

Moreover, attacks against Israeli citizens are unacceptable and must cease immediately. Argentina strongly condemns all terrorist acts and, just as it is convinced that there is no military solution to this conflict, neither is there a solution that utilizes terrorist methods. It is necessary for Palestinian leaders to address Israeli security concerns in earnest.

Argentina notes with concern the ongoing excessive use of force by Israel in the attacks and alleged attacks carried out by Palestinians and in clashes with them, as well as in violent settler actions.

Argentina also reiterates its firm support for the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and stresses that the funds for its adequate functioning must not be put at risk.

Argentina reaffirms the special status of Jerusalem, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and of the Security Council and, in that regard, rejects any unilateral attempt to modify it. Argentina believes that the Holy City must be a place of encounter and peace, and that free access to sacred sites must be guaranteed to Jews, Muslims and Christians. Any attempt to deny or relativize the historical link and the deep significance of those places for the three great monotheistic religions is completely unacceptable and does not contribute to the goal of finding a solution to the conflict.

With regard to the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, Argentina supports a political solution through dialogue and diplomacy, in accordance with international law and in a manner that upholds the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. Therefore, Argentina attaches special importance to the Geneva talks and expresses its firm support for the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Staffan de Mistura. Argentina also recognizes the positive effect of the Astana agreements and other ceasefire agreements, such as that agreed among the United States, the Russian Federation and Jordan in July 2017. Argentina emphasizes the importance for all actors to respect those agreements.

Our country condemns terrorism in all its forms and expresses its strongest rejection of the terrorist actions of the organization calling itself the Islamic State, as well as the Al-Nusra Front.

Likewise, we condemn the use of chemical weapons in any situation, under any circumstance and by any actor. We firmly believe that all those responsible for its use must be brought to justice. In that regard, Argentina has supported from the outset the impartial and technical work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. Moreover, Argentina urges that an impartial investigation of the facts be continued.

In conclusion, peace in the Middle East will be possible only through more diplomacy and negotiation. The Council should spare no effort in urging parties to act accordingly, always using the parameters recognized by the international community as a reference point, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

The Syrian Arab Republic condemns the decision by the United States to relocate its Embassy to the occupied city of Jerusalem and to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of the Israeli occupation. We stress that such decisions are flagrant violations of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and run counter to the legal, political and historical status of the city of Jerusalem. As such, they are no more than unilateral decisions that have no legitimacy or value whatsoever and have no impact on the legal status of Jerusalem. They are part of the oppression practiced against Palestine, and constitute attempts to displace its people and establish an occupying settlement entity on its territory.

The United States used its veto against a draft resolution (S/2017/1060) on the status of Jerusalem on 18 December 2017 (see S/PV.8139). That underscores its total disregard for international law and its flagrant violation of the resolutions adopted with international legitimacy. It also shows the unlimited support of the United States for the racist and Zionist entity at the expense of the Palestinian people, and proves that it has never been a fair and competent negotiator in search of peaceful settlement for the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Syria welcomes the resolution adopted by the General Assembly on Jerusalem on 20 December 2017 (resolution 72/240), which represents a slap in the face of the United States Administration by the international community that demonstrated how isolated it is in its cooperation with the Zionist entity as a result of the aggression and the arrogance that characterizes their policies. Tensions and destabilization in the world today are a result of their policies. The international community has stood by the rights of the Palestinian people in Jerusalem. It underscored the limited American influence, and that people with a free conscience cannot be bought. They are immune to those kinds of threats.

The Syrian Arab Republic, despite the ongoing terrorist war in Syria, has never lost its compass and has always maintained its principled position on the Palestinian question and on the rights of Palestinians, Muslims and Christians in Jerusalem. My country will do its utmost to regain all occupied Arab territories. It has always maintained its principled position on the Palestinian people and their right to self-determination, and to establish an independent State on all its national territory, with Jerusalem as its capital. Syria supports guaranteeing the right or refugees to return, in accordance with Council resolution 194 (1948). The Syrian Arab Republic welcomes the fact that the State of Palestine has been granted observer status at the United Nations, but calls for granting it full membership.

My country, Syria, strongly condemns Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, who insists on disregarding the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan. He did not talk about the United Nations position on the Israeli occupation of Syrian Golan, according to relevant United Nations resolutions, especially resolution 497 (1981). He did not address the suffering of more than 23,000 Syrian citizens living there under occupation for 50 years, not to mention the illegal Israeli practices and the continued Israeli violations of the 1974 Separation of Forces Agreement. Israel cooperates with the armed terrorist groups, which have occupied sites related to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force. Mr. Mladinov did not address this issue despite the fact that it is at the core of the item under discussion and constitutes an integral part of his mandate as the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

Israel has refused to return the occupied Golan to Syria or to abide by the relevant internationally legitimate resolutions, especially resolution 497 (1981). It has continued to confiscate territories in the occupied Syrian Golan, expand its settlements there, exploit the area's resources, distort its history and rob it of its culture. Israel also continues to lay mines in the Golan and is preventing the resilient Syrians living there from communicating with their families in Syria. It is depriving them of their right to an education based on a Syrian curriculum and their right to possess Syrian identity cards. It is preventing them from building national Syrians hospitals in their occupied towns in the Golan, and from receiving treatment in Damascus hospitals. Since the very first day of the occupation, Israel has instituted policies of terrorism, oppression, racial discrimination and arbitrary arrest. It has conducted mock trials and punished Syrians with long prison sentences. In that regard, I would like to remind the international community of Syria's captured Mandela, Sidqi Suleiman Al-Maqt. After spending 27 years in Israeli prisons, he was detained again in 2015 and sentenced to 14 years because he showed footage of Israeli cooperation with the Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist organizations in the Syrian Golan. We are calling on the international community to release him and all other detainees from Israeli prisons.

The international community has been silent in the face of Israel's policies and actions, which encourages Israel to continue them as well as to violate the Separation of Forces Agreement and Security Council resolutions. Those violations would never have happened without the United States Administration's unlimited support to Israel, which hinders accountability, ensures impunity and encourages Israel to continue its threats to regional and international peace and security.

The Syrians in the occupied Syrian Golan have rejected all Israel's oppressive practices, most recently the announcement by Israel's Minister of the Interior to prepare for elections of the so-called local councils in October of this year. This is a flagrant violation of Security Council resolutions and international conventions. The resilient Syrian people of the Syrian Golan have pronounced all such practices null and void and not to be recognized or obeyed, and have expressed their continued allegiance to their homeland, Syria, and their Syrian Arab nationality. They are opposed to all such Israeli attempts and decisions, which will ultimately fail. From the very first day of this heinous occupation, the residents of the Syrian Golar have continued to underscore that the occupied Golan is an integral part of the Syrian territory, and that they are Syrian nationals. Their land is holy, and they will never relinquish it to the Israeli occupiers. We want to emphasize the Syrian right to the Golan with its borders of 4 June 1967. This right will be upheld forever. We will regain our occupied territory and usurped rights, and the Israeli settlers must leave the Golan sooner or later. We will regain our territory and free our people who are suffering under the yoke of Israeli occupation, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

We call on the Security Council to take immediate action against Israel, to stop its offences and violations, and to oblige it to end its occupation of Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan. It should withdraw to the border of 4 June 1967, in accordance with Council resolutions, especially resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981).

Lastly, I was not going to respond to what we have heard in some statements. But I would like to respond to the representative of the Saudi regime. I condemn him for what he said. This is an Arabic proverb. In his statement, the representative of Al-Saud said that we need a Syrian consensus in order to arrive at a settlement in Syria. To that end, I say that the Al-Saud regime should stop issuing terrorist fatwas, which fuel terrorism in my country, Syria. We are all aware of that, and not in Syria alone but all over the world. It must stop providing support to armed terrorist organizations in order to kill Syrians. The Wahhabi Saudi regime is

supporting more than 100 armed groups in Syria. It should stop providing them with the toxic chemicals that are being used against civilians and the Syrian army. It should cease its lies and hypocrisy. Terrorism that it has been spreading for decades must be addressed on an international level in an urgent and decisive manner before it is too late. The Saudi regime is fully responsible for the evil of terrorism that is currently affecting all countries of the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Vieira (Brazil): I would like to thank the delegation of Kazakhstan for convening today's important debate.

At this time of increased tensions in the Middle East, Brazil would like to once again express its full support to the implementation of a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with Palestine and Israel living side by side in peace and security, within internationally recognized and mutually agreed-on borders based on the 1967 lines, in accordance with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the established guidelines of the peace process. At the heart of that formula is the goal of working towards the establishment of a Palestinian State that is fully sovereign, economically viable and territorially contiguous, with East Jerusalem as its capital. In that regard, the expansion of illegal settlements in Palestine continues to undermine the possibility of achieving a lasting peace in the region. The Brazilian Government would like to reaffirm its understanding that the final status of the city of Jerusalem should be defined in negotiations between Israel and Palestine, on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolutions 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016).

Recent developments related to the crisis in Syria continue to demand the attention of the Security Council. Brazil believes that the moment has arrived to launch a political process that will put an end to the war. We therefore reaffirm our full support for the efforts of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura. It is time for the entire international community to send a unified message in support of an inclusive political solution to the Syrian crisis, based on the parameters outlined in resolution 2254 (2015). Such political transition benefits from the mediation by the United Nations but must be led by and for the Syrian people, and safeguard the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country.

Brazil is concerned about the dire situation in eastern Ghouta, where increased fighting and the lack of humanitarian access make life unbearable for an estimated 400,000 people. We call on all parties to halt attacks and to allow immediate humanitarian assistance to the enclave. We are also deeply concerned about the situation in northern Syria and the violence in Afrin. We call on the relevant parties to abide by international law. We also hope that the military victory achieved against extremism last year in Iraq will be followed by a successful process of reconstruction, economic recovery and national reconciliation. Many challenges remain in ensuring a safe and dignified return of displaced persons and extending the State's authority and rule of law to the liberated areas.

We regret the renewed hostilities in Yemen. As the Secretary-General stated in December,

> "The latest outbreak of violence could not come at a worse time for the Yemeni people, who are already caught up in the world's largest humanitarian crisis" (*SG/SM/18807*).

We wish to reiterate that a viable path for the future of Yemen demands a negotiated settlement under the auspices of the United Nations.

In conclusion, Brazil reiterates its steadfast support to the efforts of the Government and people of Lebanon towards stability and development. In that regard, we emphasize the vital role played by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and its Maritime Task Force in stabilizing the highly volatile situation. Brazil is proud to lead the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force, providing its flagship vessel since 2011.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Oussihamou (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Sir, let me congratulate your friendly country on its accession to the presidency of the Security Council this month. I thank you for convening today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I would also like to thank Mr. Mladenov for his extensive briefing.

In that regard, the Kingdom of Morocco again stresses the utmost importance it attaches to the Palestinian question. Morocco and His Majesty King

Mohammed VI, Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, attach great importance to the Palestinian question and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and consider them a national issue. We would like to recall the intensive efforts made by His Majesty King Mohammed VI in support of the cause of the Palestinian people and of their legitimate and just aspirations, including the establishment of an independent Palestinian State along the borders of 4 June 1967 and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Our firm position regarding the Palestinian question aims at achieving just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on relevant international resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the two-State solution. We have always supported all initiatives leading to reviving the stalled political process since 2014, by creating the necessary conditions for a return to the negotiating table. The international community is preoccupied with conflicts in the region and at the international level. Israel continues its illegal settlement-building and judaization activities in the occupied Palestinian territories. Unfortunately, we can find no prospects for reaching a solution to the Palestinian question. We have closely followed the recent decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Given that Jerusalem is a symbol of tolerance, peace and coexistence, His Majesty King Mohammed VI, as Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, has expressed his deep personal concern, and the concern of Arab and Muslim countries and peoples following that decision.

In that regard, on 6 December 2017, His Majesty King Mohammed VI sent a letter to the Secretary-General in which His Majesty stressed that any threat to the legal and historic status of Jerusalem would lead to a religious conflict and to further tension and violence. It would undermine prospects for peace and lead to further extremism and violence. As part of the Arab ministerial delegation of the Arab Peace Initiative, and commissioned by the League of Arab States, Morocco has followed up on the repercussions of the dangerous unilateral decision.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Morocco remains an active partner in all initiatives aimed at meeting the aspirations of the Palestinian people. We renew our call for the protection of the historic and legal status of the city of Jerusalem, and of all the rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to live in dignity in their own State along the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Morocco calls on the international community, in particular the Security Council, to do their utmost and assume their responsibility and push for a permanent settlement of the Palestinian question based on international resolutions, which would further contribute to peace and security in the Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): In Turkey's capacity as the Summit Chair of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), I have the honour to deliver my statement on behalf of the States members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Today's open debate takes place as the Palestinian people continue to endure decades of displacement, injustice and denial of their inalienable rights and legitimate national aspirations, as a result of the ongoing Israeli occupation. Furthermore, it coincides with the grave circumstances and challenges generated by the decision taken by the United States last month to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and to transfer its Embassy to that location.

The decision violates international law and contradicts the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. It not only constitutes blatant disregard for the historical, legal and national rights of the Palestinian people and their very existence in the city; it is also a painful affront to the religious rights of Christians and Muslims worldwide and to universal values. We call upon all States to refrain from recognizing and supporting the decision, and to fully implement resolution 478 (1980). Al-QudsJerusalem is the holy city for all three monotheistic religions. It is the responsibility of the entire international community to preserve its historic status. Unilateral decisions on its status threaten the multi-ethnic and multicultural fabric of the city. They undermine prospects for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East and hinder the vision of a two-State solution.

During its sixth Extraordinary Summit in Istanbul on 13 December, the OIC, as the world's second largest intergovernmental body, unanimously repudiated and condemned the United State decision and declared it null and void. During the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, convened on 21 December at the request of Turkey, on behalf of the OIC, and Yemen, on behalf of the Arab League, the Assembly

repudiated the United States decision. With that vote, the membership overwhelmingly demonstrated its commitment to the relevant United Nations resolutions, assumed its collective responsibility for preventing the erosion of international law and stood by the people of Palestine. The OIC is determined to continue to follow developments on this issue very seriously and to take whatever action may therefore be necessary.

Any measures designed to alter the demographic composition, character or status of East Jerusalem are illegal and entirely invalid. The Security Council has reaffirmed that fact on numerous occasions, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the Fourth Geneva Convention. Yet Israel, the occupying Power, has ignored the Council, violated its resolutions and persisted with measures that continue to have far-reaching and extremely dangerous consequences on the ground and for the prospects for justice and peace.

Despite international protests, Israel's violations in the occupied Palestinian territory, especially in and around occupied East Jerusalem, have been increasing at an alarming rate. The OIC reiterates its condemnation and rejection of all actions imposed by Israel with the goal of altering the character, status or demography of East Jerusalem, as well as the historic and legal status quo at Al-Haram Al-Sharif, including the Al-Aqsa mosque, calls for a halt to all such illegal actions and violations and urges the Council to take decisive action to that end. The OIC is also appalled by the actions and provocations by violent settlers and occupation forces in occupied Al-Khalil/Hebron — which UNESCO has declared a world heritage site — including at religious sites. Such provocations threaten to transform a solvable political conflict into a never-ending religious war, and that must be avoided at all costs.

The OIC has repeatedly warned the Council that if it fails to deal with persistent non-compliance with its resolutions, Israel will only be further emboldened to continue its violations in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Expectations were high following the Council's adoption of resolution 2334 (2016). But Israel's deliberate and dramatic escalation of its illegal settlement activities, based on decisions taken at the highest level, continues to defy the will of the international community, as embodied in numerous Security Council resolutions. It should not be met with silence. The international condemnations of Israeli settlement policy must be translated into international action. Full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) will be crucial to advancing the cause of peace. In that context, the OIC calls on all States to uphold their obligations under the relevant United Nations resolutions, including with regard to ensuring accountability for violations, refraining from recognizing Israel's illegal annexation of Palestinian land, including Jerusalem, and other measures, as well as distinguishing on the basis of the pre-1967 borders. We further call on the Secretary-General to present written reports as provided for in resolution 2334 (2016), in view of the deterioration in the situation since the first anniversary of the resolution's adoption has come and gone.

The OIC welcomes the progress on Palestinian national reconciliation, including as it relates to the Palestinian National Consensus Government's assumption of its responsibilities in the Gaza Strip. We call on the international community to maintain its support to Palestinian reconciliation efforts. The unity of both the Palestinian people and their land will help to foster peace and stability in the region. We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our call for lifting the Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip and all the Israeli restrictions, combined with the effects of successive Israeli wars, that have generated and compounded a severe humanitarian crisis and further fragmented the Palestinians' lands.

The OIC calls on all States to continue their support to the Palestinian people and their institutions. In the light of the critical financial shortfalls and the recent United States decision to dramatically reduce its funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the OIC will continue to highlight the need for sustained, predictable and sufficient funding in order to enable the Agency to fulfil its important mandate by providing vital assistance to the Palestine refugees and contributing to regional stability at this time of heightened need and volatility. We welcome the State of Palestine's recent accession to membership of INTERPOL and its ratification of several international conventions. The OIC reaffirms its full support to the State of Palestine's endeavours to join international organizations and treaties as an integral member of the community of nations and with respect for international law, and we reject any punitive measures that might be instituted in that regard.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation reiterates its full support to all international measures and efforts

aimed at launching a multilaterally sponsored peace process, within a well-defined time frame, in order to promote the consolidation and realization of a two-State solution consistent with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, including land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the OIC's full support to the Palestinian people in their endeavour to regain their legitimate rights, including the consecration of their independent and sovereign Palestinian State within the June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to achieve a just solution to the issue of the Palestine refugees, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

I would also like to make a couple of points about Syria in my national capacity. We are continuing our efforts to advance the political process. At the last round of the Astana talks, in December 2017, two important confidence-building measures were adopted, on the release of detainees/abductees and the conduct of humanitarian demining. We continue to reiterate that the United Nations-led Geneva process should be the main forum for efforts to find a lasting political solution to the Syrian conflict, emphasizing that Astana and Sochi are mutually supportive and complementary platforms.

Only a multidimensional long-term strategy can achieve the goals of eliminating terrorism and stabilizing Syria. Turkey's resolve to fight terrorism remains firm. There can be no religious, ethnic or other justification of any kind for terrorism. If the international community starts to draw distinctions between good and bad terrorists, our joint efforts will fail. In that understanding, on 21 January we launched a counter-terrorism operation. Operation Olive Branch is being conducted in line with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter and with full respect for Syria's territorial integrity. The operation's target is terrorists and their hideouts, weapons, vehicles and equipment. Every precaution is being taken to protect civilians. The operation aims to ensure border security against the infiltration by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and attacks by the Kurdish Workers Party and the Kurdish People's Protection Units; neutralize terrorists in Afrin; and save civilians from the scourge of terrorism. Turkey will continue to take whatever measures are necessary, in line with international law, to protect its national security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Alshamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the Arab Group, I would like to express my sincere thanks to you, Mr. President, for convening today's important meeting, and to congratulate you on your presidency of the Security Council. I would also like to thank Mr. Nikolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing this morning.

In the interests of saving time I will deliver a shortened version of my statement, the full text of which will be available through the Secretariat.

In the aftermath of the Israeli aggression in 1967, the Security Council adopted resolution 242 (1967), which reaffirmed the guiding principle of the Charter of the United Nations on the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force. The resolution also laid the foundations for an acceptable settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, requiring Israel's withdrawal from the Arab territories. It remains the only basis for addressing the question of Palestine, and its reasoning is what the Arab countries referred to when they adopted the Arab Peace Initiative, supported by the entire international community, with the exception of Israel.

Israel has continued to disregard the principles of international law, and that is why it cannot be a candidate for non-permanent membership on the Security Council. Israel takes every opportunity to flout United Nations resolutions, and the Israeli Government's strategy is to make a two-State solution within the 1967 borders impossible in practice by carrying out a systematic plan that includes the building of illegal settlements in certain areas so as to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian State.

The core of this conflict is the Israeli occupation; we will never resolve this issue unless we address it directly and decisively, on the basis of the principle of land for peace. Any plan that is not focused on this central issue is bound to fail. We need a framework for reference that is based on international legitimacy, including Council resolutions. Resolution 2334 (2016) is the right way forward.

The Arab Group reiterates its condemnation of the decision of the United States to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and relocate its embassy to that city. That decision represents a flagrant violation of

international law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

Even though this policy does not have any legal impact that would change the status of Jerusalem, the Arab Group considers it a clear violation of the rights of the Palestinian people and an attack on both Arab and Muslim nations, as well as on Christians around the world.

The strong international consensus in the Security Council and in the General Assembly on the importance of preserving the legal status of Jerusalem is intended not only to save the peace process but also to protect international legitimacy, the resolutions of the United Nations and the role of the Organization in maintaining international peace and security. It is in this spirit that we deem it very important for Member States — especially the members of the Security Council — to meet their commitments in implementing the Council's resolutions and respect their obligations thereunder.

We must refer here to resolution 478 (1980), which stressed that any measures aiming to change Jerusalem's landmarks or status are invalid and must be repealed, and invited countries to withdraw their diplomatic missions from the Holy City. Moreover, the General Assembly confirmed in its resolution ES-10/19, adopted on 21 December 2017, the importance of Member States maintaining the status quo in Jerusalem, complying with all Security Council resolutions on Jerusalem and not recognizing any actions or measures contrary to past resolutions.

Therefore, based on international law and United Nations resolutions on the Palestine question and Jerusalem, the Arab Group demands that the following measures be taken by the Security Council and Member States.

First, they should not recognize any unilateral measures or procedures that target Jerusalem's character or its demographic composition, stressing that these procedures are null and void and have no legal impact.

Secondly, they should refrain from establishing diplomatic missions in Jerusalem, pursuant to the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Thirdly, they should emphasize that the issue of Jerusalem is a final-status issue that must be decided through negotiations between the parties, and refrain from taking any steps that would prejudice the results of final-status negotiations.

Fourthly, they should demonstrate the seriousness of unilateral actions that threaten the two-State solution.

And, fifthly, they should intensify and accelerate their efforts and support activities at the international and regional levels to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

In this context, we take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks and gratitude to all Member States that voted in favour of General Assembly resolution ES-10/19 at its most recent emergency session.

We take this opportunity to express our great appreciation for the noble humanitarian work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in aiding over 5.5 million Palestinian refugees, particularly during the critical times the Agency is facing. We call on the members of the international community to honour their commitments to Palestinian refugees. We also express our sincere appreciation for the efforts of the funding countries to reduce the Agency's deficit.

It is now more than ever necessary to take all possible measures in order to put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict, which has existed for more than seven decades. In this context, we reaffirm that stability and peace in the region will not be achieved so long as Israel continues to occupy the Palestinian and Arab territories.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Hattrem (Norway): Long-term peace, security and prosperity for Israelis and Palestinians both can be achieved only through a negotiated two-State solution. The political process has been at a standstill for years, and the situation is becoming increasingly tense and dangerously fragile. The outstanding final-status issues must be resolved through direct negotiations between the parties, with support from the international community.

Norway's objection to settlements is long-standing and firm. Settlement activity undermines the prospects for a two-State solution and must stop.

At this critical juncture, with the support of the parties and other stakeholders, Norway and the European Union have decided to convene an extraordinary ministerial session of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in Brussels on 31 January. The meeting will address two issues. First, there is an urgent need to discuss measures that may have a positive impact

on efforts to restart final-status negotiations. Progress towards realizing the two-State solution must be made. Secondly, the meeting will also discuss efforts to assist the Palestinian Authority to reinstate its control in Gaza, as outlined in the Cairo agreement of 12 October 2017.

The delivery by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) of essential services, especially education and health services, is crucial to address the basic needs of the Palestinian refugees. In these efforts, UNRWA also has a vital role in preserving stability in the region, particularly in Lebanon and Jordan. The financial situation of UNRWA is critical, and there is a risk that the organization will not be able to deliver on its mandate. Together with UNRWA, the donors must find a way to address this acute crisis.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has lost almost all its territory in Iraq and Syria, in great part due to the efforts of the anti-ISIL coalition and its local partners. However, to achieve long-term stability in the liberated areas, inclusive political solutions and reconciliation are key. We urge the Iraqi Government to address the underlying factors that led to the emergence of ISIL.

Norway is concerned about the recent escalation in north-western Syria. More than 200,000 people have been displaced since mid-December. We reiterate the need to respect resolution 2393 (2017) so as to allow humanitarian access to those in need.

Once again, we underline the need for all parties involved in the conflict to work through the United Nations-led negotiations to secure a durable peace. Norway continues to stand by the Syrian people. We have provided more than $1 billion in assistance to the Syria crisis since 2011, and we will contribute an additional half a billion dollars over the next two years.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Bahr Aluloom (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): We should like at the outset to congratulate the Republic of Kazakhstan on its assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month and to thank you, Sir, for having convened this open debate on the situation in the Middle East.

Furthermore, we congratulate Kuwait, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, the Netherlands, Poland and Peru, which were elected as members of the Security Council in 2018 in order to help maintain international peace and security. We thank the countries leaving the Council: Egypt, Italy, Japan, Ukraine, Senegal and Uruguay. We would also like to thank Mr. Mladenov for his comprehensive briefing this morning on the situation in the Middle East.

My delegation supports the statements made by the representatives of Venezuela, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries; the United Arab Emirates, on behalf of the Group of Arab States; and Turkey, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The Republic of Iraq reiterates its unwavering position in favour of a just and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question based on the establishment of the independent Palestinian state within the borders of 4 June 1967, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative and the international legitimacy. It is now more important than ever to maintain the prospects for peace. We warn against the danger of mishandling the Palestinian question and allowing some to present that cause as a religious war, which fuels hatred and increases violence. That will not be conducive to the peace to which we all aspire.

Iraq has always supported the cause of the Palestinian people and their just struggle to attain their legitimate rights. We are particularly concerned about the dire humanitarian situation of the Palestinians caused by Israel's ongoing flouting of international decisions and its continued acts of aggression, of which women, the elderly and children are the victims. The overall infrastructure is undermined and the holy sites in Al-Quds and Al-Aqsa mosque are also impacted. That is why the Security Council must play its role in ending such unprecedented acts, protecting the Palestinians and ensuring that the occupied territories are returned to the 1967 borders, in line with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

In addition, we condemn all illegal Israeli settlement activities, which are a major obstacle to peace in the region, while the Arab side acts in good faith towards ending this prolonged conflict. We need to achieve a just peace that will have a positive impact on the management of resources and the economy, and strengthen security in the Middle East.

We call on all Member States to shoulder their responsibilities by taking actions that will restore the Palestinian people's faith in international law as the best means to realize our rights and freedom, and to

prevent further deterioration, which could be exploited by extremists to exacerbate the situation of violence, terrorism and widespread unrest in the region and elsewhere. We must all strive to find a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

We call also on those countries that have not yet recognized the Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital and within the 1967 borders, to do so without delay. That would be an investment in peace, in line with the long-standing international consensus and international commitment, and a significant contribution to preserving the prospects for peace and to putting an end to activities that undermine efforts to find a just and lasting solution, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002.

Iraq is of the view that we must take advantage of this impetus and the renewed international interest in the Palestinian question. We should go forward with the direct and serious negotiations under the auspices of the United States, the European Union and the Arab States. We must take advantage of the rapprochement of and the unity between the Palestinian factions, represented today by the Palestinian Authority. However, we should ensure that the outcome of the negotiations will be respected by both parties.

To conclude, my Government values the efforts of the Secretary-General, his Special Coordinator, Mr. Mladenov, and members of the Security Council in launching initiatives to achieve a comprehensive and lasting peace and a solution to all final-status issues on the basis of the Security Council resolutions. We urge the international parties to the peace negotiations to expedite their work and overcome the difficulties that hinder the just and comprehensive solution.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Mr. Gunnarsson (Iceland): Allow me first to thank the presidency of Kazakhstan for convening this quarterly meeting on the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

The Middle East region faces ongoing major conflicts and multiple humanitarian crises. The humanitarian situation in Syria remains marked by unparalleled suffering, destruction and disregard for human life, as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has described it. It is just over a year since the General Assembly adopted resolution 71/248 on establishing a mechanism to assist in the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the most serious crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic. The resolution demonstrates the determination of the General Assembly to ensure justice in the long term. In the meantime, as the Secretary-General has said, peace is a moral and political imperative for the Syrian people and for the world.

What the Secretary-General has called a stupid war has devastated the lives of millions of Yemenis. It has been called the world's largest humanitarian catastrophe and is entirely man-made. We should pay more attention to that conflict, where civilians are paying a huge price in a senseless war that has been overshadowed by other conflicts in the region. One has to wonder about the humanity of those responsible.

Compared with other conflicts in the Middle East region, the Israel-Palestine conflict should be solvable. There is a clear objective — the two-State solution, under which both Israel and Palestine will live side by side in peace. We must avoid actions that take us further away from the two-State solution or that have the potential to further undermine trust, enflame passions and spark violence. That applies equally to violence by Palestinian individuals or organizations targeting Israelis and the disproportionate Israeli military response and to the ongoing Israeli settlement policy. We also appeal to powerful sponsor countries to work for the conditions and environment conducive to conducting peace negotiations.

Meanwhile, the precarious existence of many Palestinians, particularly in Gaza, is a humanitarian and security concern. Failure to address the ongoing humanitarian needs of the Palestinian refugee population has the potential to create a breeding ground for extremism among young people, who would be put out of school and out of hope. On behalf of the United Nations, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is carrying out vital work, under the principled leadership of Commissioner-General Krahenbuhl. Undermining UNRWA now undermines peace and stability in the Middle East.

Iceland believes that international law and multilateral institutions, even though not always perfect, must underpin relations between States and their peoples. The alternative is that the rule of

might is right, which almost always leads to violence and conflict. As the Secretary-General said a few days ago [AT A PRESS CONFERENCE], we need more dialogue and deeper international cooperation.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Gad (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his periodic briefing on developments on the Palestinian question and the peace process. We are coming together today for this periodic meeting in order to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, the effect of the serious developments on our entire region and their ramifications on the international level.

Egypt has repeatedly warned against unilateral measures, actions and decisions that run counter to international legitimacy and resolutions on the Palestinian question that have been agreed upon and accepted by the international community. We have also pointed out several times that all countries need to honour international law, especially international humanitarian law, including relevant Geneva conventions and instruments. Egypt is convinced that just and lasting peace is to be achieved through respect for international law and legitimacy as the only means to ensure the rights of peoples. Any measures aimed at undermining such rights will only hamper efforts to achieve peace and compromise the forces battling for peace, and thus serve only as a pretext for the forces of extremism and violence.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories is deteriorating. Palestinians continue to suffer. They can no longer enjoy their freedom and their right to self-determination and to live in an independent State in peace and security. That is why the international community and its various bodies and institutions find themselves in a dilemma that raises questions about their ability to implement the decisions they adopt and their credibility in the eyes of the people of the world who truly respect them. It also allows countries to break from the international consensus, the terms of reference, signed treaties and agreements without a deterrent factor that ensures stability and international peace and security.

We meet periodically and repeat the same pronouncements on elusive peace, the deterioration of humanitarian situation and suffering of the Palestinians. We are all responsible. We must put an end to the occupation as the only way to restore stability and security to the region. The feelings of injustice, oppression and impotence to make changes in the region, especially with regard to the Palestinian question, are apparent, particularly in light of the escalation of regional tensions and the collapse of institutions. That creates an opportunity for some to increase their violence and aggression and to spread their extremist and racist ideologies. We must therefore take the necessary measures to change the situation, which poses a genuine threat to international peace and security.

Egypt is facing many challenges, but we have always sought to manage the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. That does not, however, absolve the occupying Power from its responsibilities to the Palestinian territories, particularly Gaza. Measures such as checkpoints must be relaxed and rebuilding must begin. That will benefit all parties and ensure security and stability.

Imposing a status quo, changing the situation on the ground, shirking one's responsibilities towards signed conventions, pursuing provocative and punitive measures against the Palestinians, continuing to build settlements on Palestinian territories and attempting to legitimize those actions by changing the status of East Jerusalem will not ensure security for any party, especially as we know that all actions that do not respect international resolutions or international law are invalid and have no legal effect on the occupied party or on the international community.

Egypt has repeatedly called on the parties concerned to take the measures necessary to return to the negotiating table, in accordance with the relevant resolutions and on the basis of the two-State solution. That is the only way to safeguard the rights of the Palestinians and Israelis alike. Any other solution that is not agreed to bilaterally will only exacerbate tensions.

In that regard, Egypt is committed to putting an end to Palestinian division, which had a negative impact on the Palestinian question. We call on the international community to support Egyptian efforts in favour of the Palestinian Government in order for it to be able to successfully perform its tasks, and overcome the obstacles to Palestinian reconciliation. In our view, Palestinian reconciliation is one of the best

ways to build a strong, united Palestinian society that could be a full-fledged partner in peace, which in turn would allow for the creation of a viable and consistent Palestinian State.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, and your friendly country on presiding over the Security Council. We thank you for convening this meeting and Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing this morning.

We also take this opportunity to congratulate the brotherly and friendly countries that have joined the Security Council.

The Middle East region is a source of many grave and complicated threats to international peace and security that should be considered by the Security Council, including ongoing decades-long threats and emerging threats. All those challenges require us to intensify cooperation among the countries of the region in particular, and the international community in general, so as to resolve the crises and its causes, and address their ramifications in a sustained manner.

The state of Qatar is confident that resolving the Palestinian question and achieving peace will be beneficial to the Palestinians and the Israelis alike, and that the region and even the world will bear its fruits. The state of Qatar reiterates its support for all efforts to resume the peace process in order to reach a just, comprehensive and sustainable solution based on two States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace and security, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Respect for the legal status of Al-Quds Al-Sharif is especially important in the context of the peace process, in line with Security Council resolutions and all initiatives to achieve peace in the Middle East. We stress the importance of achieving peace, and we must therefore deal with Al-Quds as an integral element of reaching a comprehensive and final settlement of the Middle East questions, in accordance with resolutions of international legitimacy, including resolution 478 (1980) and General Assembly resolution 72/240, on the status of Al-Quds, which underscored Al-Quds as a final-status issue that must be resolved through negotiations among the parties, and non-recognition of any measure or action aimed at changing the character, legal status or demographic configuration of Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

The State of Qatar stresses yet again that the ongoing Syrian crisis undermines regional and international security. Its humanitarian consequences are unprecedented and require us to step up our efforts to reach a political solution based on the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and the relevant Security Council resolutions. That will meet the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people to security and stability and maintain Syria's national unity. We also stress the need to commit to international law, especially international humanitarian law, and protect civilians. We support efforts to eradicate terrorism in Syria, end violence and escalation, and stabilize the situation in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and international law. We will continue to work with international partners to provide humanitarian support to our Syrian brethren.

The continued blockade of and illegal unilateral measures taken against the State of Qatar have had grave repercussions on regional and international peace and security, exacerbate instability in the region, and reflect negatively on the international campaign to combat terrorism. Recently, instead of receiving a response to the efforts of brotherly and friendly nations to reach a settlement satisfactory to all parties through dialogue based on the Charter of the United Nations and international law, we have seen an escalation and a series of provocations against the State of Qatar, in violation of the provisions of the Charter and international law.

Pursuant to the commitments of the State of Qatar under international law and as a Member of the United Nations, we have adhered to the procedures set out in the Charter with respect to this matter and have kept the United Nations Secretariat and the Security Council abreast of this issue, in line with Article 35 of the Charter. While we stress the importance of dialogue in settling disputes and maintaining good-neighbourly relations, we categorically reject any violation of our sovereignty and territorial integrity, and insist on our legitimate right, under international law and the Charter of the United Nations, to defend our sovereignty, territorial integrity and national security. The State of

Qatar renews its commitment to the valued mediation of His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and we appreciate the support of all countries for this initiative to resolve the crisis.

In conclusion, the State of Qatar will continue to making a positive contribution to efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East and the objectives of the Security Council pertaining to the maintenance of international peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Bin Momen (Bangladesh): We thank the Kazakh presidency for convening this open debate and for its efficient stewardship of the Council this month.

Bangladesh aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). We look forward to participating in the forthcoming Ministerial Meeting of the NAM Committee on Palestine, to be held in Addis Ababa.

We thank the Secretary-General's Special Representative for his comprehensive briefing and share his profound concern over the recent escalation of tension and violence around the Palestinian question. We urge all concerned to exercise maximum restraint and to keep all meaningful options open for resuming the peace process negotiations, thereby keeping alive our conviction in a two-State solution.

It is a tragic irony that while we were hoping to see some glimmer of hope in the fiftieth year of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian and Arab territories, we instead witnessed the situation spiralling into unwarranted provocative acts and violence, jeopardizing the prospects of the peace process and seriously undermining the rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Bangladesh remains deeply concerned over unilateral decisions and actions that compromise the standing of East Jerusalem as a final-status issue in the peace process and contribute to changing the city's historical and legal status, demographic structure and Arab-Islamic character. Bangladesh reaffirms the overriding importance of preserving the legal status of Jerusalem within the framework of relevant United Nations resolutions, including those adopted by the Council.

Bangladesh urges the Council to prevail upon Israel to immediately halt its illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, lift the blockade in the Gaza Strip, and put an end to all forms of occupation and violence. We remain concerned over Israel's total disregard for complying with the provisions of resolution 2234 (2016). Immediate priority must be given to ensuring international protection for the Palestinian people, who have suffered for decades from the occupying Power's policy of collective punishment.

The continued breaches of international humanitarian law and systematic human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territories have given rise to an egregious culture of impunity. In the absence of effective international accountability, the occupying Power continues to persecute Palestinian civilians, imprison and abuse scores of Palestinians in its detention centres, and dispossess and evict thousands of Palestinian families through its unlawful construction and expansion of settlements.

Bangladesh shares concerns over funding cuts for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which will have grave consequences for millions of Palestinian refugees in a number of host countries. We reaffirm the need to ensure enhanced, predictable and sustainable funding for UNRWA, and urge Member States to help uphold UNRWA's ability to make a difference in the lives of Palestinian refugees.

Under the guidance of our Honourable Prime Minister, the Government and the people of Bangladesh remain steadfast in our support for the just and legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable rights, including their right to self- determination and the establishment of an independent, viable, contiguous and sovereign Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in the framework of a two-State solution.

Bangladesh looks forward to seeing positive signs emerge from various regional and bilateral initiatives being pursued to address the Palestinian question. We emphasize that provocations, unilateral actions and the escalation of tension are totally incompatible with our shared pursuit of peace and security in the region. We expect the Council to demonstrate unity of purpose in finding peaceful, just and lasting solutions to all protracted conflicts and the resulting humanitarian situations around the world, including the Palestinian question.

The President: I now give the floor to the Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian people.

Mr. Seck (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian people, I would like at the outset to pay tribute to the professionalism with which the delegation of Kazakhstan has conducted the work of the Security Council this month, and to welcome this open debate, which allows us to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

I reiterate the deep concern of the members of the Committee over recent developments on the ground that continue to undermine hopes for a peaceful settlement to the question of Palestine. Certainly, the almost unanimous support of the members of the Security Council in December for draft resolution S/2017/1060, on Jerusalem, and the General Assembly's subsequent adoption of resolution ES-10/19 on 21 December 2017, at the tenth emergency special session, demonstrated the already obvious, unwavering commitment of the international community to a peaceful solution to this dispute. That resolution declared nuil and void any decision or action intended to alter Jerusalem's character, status or demographic composition and called on all States to refrain for the time being from establishing diplomatic missions in the holy city. The Committee is convinced that, pursuant to the relevant United Nations resolutions and the long-standing international consensus, that Jerusalem remains a final-status issue to be resolved through negotiations.

The Committee is also concerned that Israel, as the occupying Power, has recently adopted measures imposing changes to the status quo on the ground. Those measures include the adoption of a law earlier this month by the Israeli Parliament that would prevent any future Israeli Government to cede any part of Jerusalem, including East Jerusalem, to an independent Palestinian State in the framework of negotiations. Furthermore, the central committee of the ruling majoritarian party in Israel recently adopted a resolution calling for the imposition of Israeli law on all settlements in the West Bank, de facto annexing them. If that resolution were to become law, it would close the door to a negotiated solution and constitute a violation of successive Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2017). In addition to being illegal under international law, those decisions undermine the two-State solution and, in that respect, must be rejected by the international community.

It is incumbent on the international community, especially our Council, to assume its responsibility to uphold the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and independence as a sovereign and viable State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. As the Committee remains resolutely committed to a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, it condemns all forms of violence and incitement to hatred and extremism, regardless of the perpetrators or motives. For that reason, the Committee invites the international community to pursue its long-standing efforts to support, inter alia, inter-Palestinian reconciliation, guarantee the financial viability of Palestinian institutions and strengthen Palestinian capacity-building to prepare them to manage an independent State, freed from the occupation.

In that connection, the Committee calls on Members, in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions, to strengthen support and assistance to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, whose humanitarian and development work is indispensable to millions of Palestinian refugees. As key pillars, those institutions bring hope and stability to the Palestinian people, especially the young, in a region that is experiencing severe convulsions.

As the Committee continuously repeats, there is no alternative to the two-State solution, the international community must continue and scale up its action with all stakeholders so that the people Palestinian people, like all other peoples, including the Israeli people, can enjoy an independent and sovereign State within viable and internationally recognized borders, living in peace and security alongside its neighbours, including the State of Israel. In that spirit, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People will continue to deliver on its mandate to achieve those ends.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Ja Song-Nam (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Allow me first to express my gratitude to you, Mr. President, for having convened today's open debate of the Security Council in a timely manner on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. My delegation fully believes that under

your able leadership, the current debate will give significant momentum to the search for a solution for the Middle East.

Furthermore, my delegation highly appreciates and fully supports the statement delivered by Ambassador Samuel Moncada, Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The resolution of the question of Palestine is one of the highest priorities for securing peace and security in the Middle East. The Middle East question, which resulted from the Israeli occupation of Arab territories in 1948, remains stalemated, despite the various United Nations resolutions that have been adopted and numerous proposals, including the Arab Peace Initiative, that have been brought to the negotiating table. That is entirely due to Israel's anti-peace stance and occupation policy, as well as the United States policy of double standards in the Middle East in an effort to always protect Israel.

The international community has consistently demanded the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital. During the resumed tenth emergency special session in December, the General Assembly overwhelmingly adopted resolution ES-10/19, on the status of Jerusalem, which opposed the decision of the United States President to recognize Al-Quds as the capital of Israel and move the United States Embassy there. It was another opportunity to showcase the unified will of the international community. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea delegation believes that the decision of United States President Trump deserves our global condemnation and public rejection, as it constitutes an open defiance of and insult to the legitimacy and unanimous will of the international community.

The status of Al-Quds should be fairly addressed by means of restoring the national right of the Palestinian people and reaching a comprehensive and lasting solution to the Middle East question. The United States and Israel should pay due attention to the efforts of the international community to resolve the issue of the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, in conformity with international law and other relevant Security Council resolutions for the benefit of the Palestinian and Arab people. They must also honestly and diligently address the peace process in the Middle East.

The establishment of an independent State of Palestine is the inalienable and sovereign right of the Palestinian people. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has recognized Palestine as an official State since 1988, and has ever since extended unwavering support for and solidarity with the struggle of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State. My delegation avails itself of this opportunity to reiterate its firm support and encouragement for the struggle of the Palestinian people to exercise its legitimate right to establish an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the struggle of the Arab people in its quest for justice. My delegation emphasizes that we must put an end to the Israeli military occupation and discrimination against human rights in Palestine at the earliest date and allow the Palestinian people to exercise its full right to national self-determination.

In conclusion, my delegation clarifies once again the principled position of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea that all disputes, including the Syrian issue, should be resolved peacefully through dialogue and negotiations between the parties, without any foreign intervention, in conformity with the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations of respect for sovereignty and non-interference.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Yaakob (Malaysia): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

Malaysia aligns itself with the statements delivered by the Permanent Representative of Turkey, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and by the Permanent Representative of Venezuela, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The situation in Palestine remains dire. Prospects for the peaceful resolution of the longest man-made conflict remains dim. This is due to the continued defiance and violations of Israel, the occupying Power, of various relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). We therefore demand that Israel stop all violations and illegal actions in the occupied Palestinian territories, and to fully comply with all its obligations, as prescribed by the relevant resolutions and international law and norms.

It is the responsibility of all Member States to not take decisions or create conditions that would

negatively effect efforts towards finding a just and peaceful solution to the conflict. It is in this context that Malaysia reiterates its deep concern over the decision of the United States to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and to relocate its Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The decision undermines efforts to find a comprehensive, just and durable solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It has caused dismay and frustration to a majority of Member States, in particular in the Muslim world, and to those who wish to see peace, stability and security in the region.

More importantly, the decision violates and undermines the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, such as resolution 478 (1980) and resolution 2334 (2016). Those resolutions provide the foundation for the peace process that affirmed the city of Jerusalem as a final-status issue that must be resolved through bilateral negotiations between Palestine and Israel in the framework of the two-State solution. The recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel would only embolden Israel, the occupying Power, to continue with its oppressive and repressive policies in the occupied Palestinian territory, causing immense suffering to the Palestinian people. We are concerned that this dire situation will only feed into the agenda of extremists.

Malaysia is very concerned over the dwindling financial support for the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in providing assistance, protection and advocacy for Palestinian refugees. We therefore call on all Member States to fortify their support for UNRWA so as to ensure that the basic needs of the Palestinian refugees are met, including educational access to almost half a million boys and girls in 700 UNRWA schools; emergency food assistance and other support, as well as primary health care, including prenatal care; and other life-saving services. On its part, Malaysia will continue to provide assistance, within its means, to UNRWA.

Malaysia sincerely hopes that all Members of the United Nations can make a helpful contribution to breaking the impasse in the Middle East peace process, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, as well as international law and norms. Malaysia continues to believe that a two-State solution, with Palestinians and Israelis living side by side in peace, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, is the only viable resolution to this long-standing conflict.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Israel to make a further statement.

Ms. Meitzad (Israel): I know it has been a long day, but I have requested the floor to exercise my right of reply in order to comment on some of the remarks that were made earlier today in this forum.

Let me first address the comments made by the Lebanese Ambassador. On several occasions over the past year, the Lebanese President has referred to Hizbullah, a designated terrorist organization, as an essential governing partner and a legitimate armed Power in Lebanon. Among other things, he has described Hizbullah as playing "a complementary role to the Lebanese Army". That casts serious doubt on Lebanon's declared commitment to international law.

The Ambassador also emphasized her Government's support for resolution 1701 (2006), while in fact at the same time Lebanon has allowed Hizbullah terrorists to take full control of southern Lebanon. Lebanon has allowed Hizbullah to accumulate more than 100,000 missiles and rockets, turning its own civilians into human shields. Not only does Lebanon allow Hizbullah to fully conduct its terrorist activities within Lebanese territories, but it also turns a blind eye when Hizbullah invites and hosts commandos of an Iraqi Shia militia in southern Lebanon. I advise Lebanon to focus its energy on ensuring both the full implementation of all Security Council resolutions, including resolution 1701 (2006) and 1559 (2004), and the full authority of the Lebanese Government over its country.

Speaking of human rights abusers, let me refer to the Syrian representative, who has once again debased this forum with conspiracy theories and ludicrous fabrications. It is difficult to comprehend where the Syrian delegation actually finds the adacity to take the floor when the Syrian regime routinely and systematically targets its own civilians, prevents them from receiving humanitarian aid, and deliberately causes their suffering. On top of that, as we speak the Syrian Government is perpetrating a brutal and inhumane siege against its own people in eastern Ghouta, once again using, as reported, chemical weapons to attack its own people. Let me recall that when the Syrian regime has committed such atrocities, Israel has provided humanitarian aid to hundreds of Syrians, including by treating them in Israeli hospitals. I shall not take any

more of the Council's time to respond to a regime that has simply lost all credibility.

As for the comments made by the representative of Venezuela, that country is in a state of economic and moral bankruptcy. I would recommend that the representative of Venezuela address the severe shortcomings of his own country, in which endemic violence, widespread hunger, brutal repression of dissidents and State-sanctioned torture and execution are taking place on a daily basis.

I turn now to Bolivia. It is deeply disappointing that once again the representative of Bolivia has delivered a one-sided, factually incorrect statement that does not reflect the true situation on the ground between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Bolivia has been a member of the Security Council for over a year now, yet not once has it approached Israel to conduct a constructive conversation about the conflict. We would expect at a minimum that before determining a position Bolivia would listen to both sides.

Let me conclude by turning to the comments that were made here earlier today by the representative of Kuwait, a new Council member. Restricting freedom of expression, practicing torture, permitting domestic violence, mainly towards women, and jailing its citizens for criticizing the Government are simply common practices for Kuwait. If only the people of Kuwait could exercise freedom of speech — the same freedom of speech that their representative exploited today to attack Israel — perhaps Kuwait's statement would have sounded less absurd.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.